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HE HAD SEEN THE HANDSOME STRANGER PLACING A RING ON HIS IDOL'S FINGER.

His Idol; or, The Ill-Starred Marriage.

BY MRS. MARY REED CROWELL.

CHAPTER I.

THE BETROTHED.

THE Grange was now one blaze of welcoming light, and the occupants were adorning the rooms with all the taste of which they were possessed. Down-stairs, every imaginable preparation for a sumptuous feast was going rapidly on, superintended by the skillful cook, from whose domains the savory scents would occasionally reach the apartments above, where were waiting the family.

The family at the Grange were very aristocratic, very wealthy, and exclusive—so much so, that the honor of being placed on Mrs. Doctor Elverton's visiting-list was greatly coveted in the vicinity by aspiring neighbors.

The household at the Grange was not large, consisting of the handsome, dignified husband and father, Doctor Le Roy Elverton, a retired physician of great skill and world-wide reputation, his elegant lady-wife, and their only child, Maude.

Maude Elverton was but a trifle over eighteen, and charmingly lovely. Of a family noted for their personal beauty on her mother's side, and

descended from the famous Elvertons on the other, she inherited graces of mind and of person, that, aided by the liberal education she had received, fitted her to shine "a bright, particular star" in any society.

Her gentle, unaffected, and withal dignified mien, no less than the sweet face, the sloping shoulders, the round, faultless arm, with its tiny white hand and slender, tapering fingers; her little naked foot, peeping now and then from the coquettish walking skirts; all these had made many impressions on the gentlemen she had met from time to time.

Impressions that were of no avail, however, much as Maude Elverton was admired; for of all the scores who, in the brief twelve months she had been in society, had waited on the doctor to obtain permission to offer their addresses to his beautiful child, the same reply invariably came:

"Miss Elverton's future husband is already selected.

To a person she had never seen, but of whom report spoke proudly and favorably, to George Casselmaine, her own cousin, and heir to a large fortune, and natural inheritor of personal beauty and intellectual strength, Maude Elverton was to be married. From her childhood days, since she could remember her parents' consultations together, Maude had learned to regard the unknown cousin as her future husband. He, in his turn, had ever considered the lovely girl, whose picture her mother had sent him, his wife.

Mutually satisfied with this state of affairs, and liking each other at a distance, the intervening years of their childhood had passed until now the time had come when they were to meet.

This is what the family at the Grange were waiting for that cool autumn afternoon. Waiting for George Casselmaine.

Maude and her mother were alone in the dressing-room of the former, who had finished her toilet, and sat by the window, glancing carelessly down the road.

"How does he look, mamma? Is he really as handsome as his picture, or was the artist flattering? I am wild with curiosity to see him."

Maude's eyes turned inquiringly to her mother.

"George Casselmaine is just what you see he is in his picture. Add to that his grace, refinement and elegant ease of manner."

"Perhaps I will not meet his expectations, mamma, if he is so perfect."

Maude laughed as she spoke, even while a proudly self-conscious look of her charms shone in her dark-blue eyes.

Mrs. Elverton looked quickly up, a haughty smile curving her lips.

"Not be satisfied with *you*? Child, a prince might be delighted to wed *you*."

Her maternal pride was her greatest passion, and Maude, whose head was not turned in the least by her fond flatteries, loved the parent for the delight she felt in the daughter.

"No, indeed," resumed Mrs. Elverton. "George Casselmaine will find all he desires, all he expects in you, my darling. And I can as assuredly say that in him you will perceive every thing to admire, to please you."

"And to love, dearest mamma?"

Maude asked the question in a peculiarly pointed tone of voice.

Her mother raised her eyebrows in amazement.

"My child! how could you *help* but love him, when I give you such a glowing description? Love him, Maude? Any woman would do that; they could not avoid it."

"You are an enthusiast on the subject of your future son-in-law, dearest mamma. Perhaps others judge less partially."

"Well, you must be your own judge of that, my child. In a very short time you will see him—"

Mrs. Elverton was interrupted by her daughter's voice, who, with flushed cheeks, was gazing eagerly from the window.

"Is it he?" she asked, quickly following Maude's look.

A noble-looking young man was passing the great gate, and as Maude bowed, he returned the salute.

"No, mamma; it is only an acquaintance."

Her words were lightly spoken, but the blush on her face, and the fire in her eyes, were not unnoticed by Mrs. Elverton.

"Maude, Maude, why does the sight of Fred Trevlyn bring that color to your cheeks?"

Almost sternly she asked the question.

The tint only deepened as Maude replied:

"Was I blushing, mamma? That was very foolish."

Mrs. Elverton brought her chair close to her daughter.

"Can it be possible, Maude Elverton, that you were thinking of him, of *any one*, when you asked me if there was any thing to love in George Casselmaine?"

Maude turned guiltily away.

"I did not think that of you; your father and I thought that when your cousin came, it would be to welcome him with an undivided heart, and yet you blush when the owner of the Archery passes your window. Oh, Maude!"

Her tones were both reproving and vindictive.

"You accuse me of that which is false, mamma. I know of no reason why I *should* betray emotion at sight of Fred Trevlyn, and I certainly shall meet my cousin with as whole a heart as he brings to me. I only know one truth, and that is, that Mr. Trevlyn seems adapted to love, and I wondered if George was equally so."

"Oh!" and Mrs. Elverton uttered a faint scream, "how should *you* know enough of Mr. Trevlyn to know he seems of a 'loving' temperament?"

Again the hot flush rose to Maude's white forehead, but she did not choose to tell her mother of the earnest glances of the dark, handsome eyes that often had met her own in a grave, serious way that had made her heart beat wildly, or the delicate, tender attentions he had offered her on the two occasions they had met. Maude did not tell this to her mother, for her heart would not let her. Suddenly she turned to Mrs. Elverton.

"Mamma, this is exceedingly foolish in both of us. In me, for acting so childishly at mere sight of a comparative stranger; and in you, dear mamma, for accusing me of the improbable fault of being traitress to you and papa, and—*and* George Casselmaine," she added, with a genuine embarrassment that effectually removed her mother's suspicions.

"I am only too glad I was wrong, my darling, and now—*There, there, Maude, comes your lover!*"

A hasty glance rewarded her with a moment's glimpse of a tall, handsomely-dressed gentleman, whom her father was welcoming at the door. His face she had not seen, but his voice, as the tones were wafted up the stairs, was full, round and musical.

Her heart beat as she stepped from her room and for a moment a wild throb of shame filled her heart, as she thought how utterly her own tastes and judgment were ignored—how complete a tool she was in her parents' hands. George Casselmaine would hate her, she thought, for her unmaidenliness, and, as if by mere force of contrast, she reflected that Fred Trevlyn would never have degraded her so. But, then, George Casselmaine was as much involved as herself in this arrangement, and if he had traveled from Germany to see her, she thought she

could go down-stairs in her own father's house to meet him.

Again her own cool, dignified self, she accepted her father's arm at the foot of the broad, elegant staircase.

Proudly Doctor Elverton led her in.

"This is our daughter, our Maude, *your* Maude, dear George. My darling, let me introduce your cousin, George Casselmaine, and our future son, we hope."

Maude blushed prettily, and extended her hand in cordial welcome.

The gentleman clasped it warmly.

"For years I have dreamed of this meeting, and now the realization far exceeds my wildest anticipations. My sweet cousin, we are already the best friends imaginable, are we not?"

"Most certainly."

The earliest greetings were over—that which Maude had so dreaded—and, accepting his arm, she and George Casselmaine walked away, like old-time friends, conversing pleasantly.

"I hardly dared hope you would desire to keep to me the promise your father made mine when we were children," he said, in his low, musical tones, as they promenaded slowly up and down the wide marble-floored halls.

"Now that I have seen you, Maude, I almost tremble when I think how miraculous it is that such beauty has been reserved for me. Strange that no one has robbed me of the jewel I was in such ignorance of until this hour."

Maude laughed merrily.

"Oh, sir, like all men, you seek to please by adulation, and perhaps you can more satisfactorily account for my condition to-day from the fact that I care very little for gentlemen's society."

He colored slightly at her well-pointed allusion.

"Let me hope your opinion may be altered before long, concerning me, at least. And to impress the fact on your mind that I shall constantly and steadfastly aim to attain that standard which is highest in your opinion, my dear cousin, may I place this on your finger—the talisman that shall protect while it strengthens, and recall thoughts of me while it whispers how dearly I love you?"

He held a shining circlet toward her as he spoke.

"It is no fetter, dear Maude, only a charm. Will you wear it for my sake?"

She blushed, smiled, and then extended her hand, while George Casselmaine slipped on the ring.

He led her to her parents.

"My betrothed wife, Doctor Elverton, dear madam."

Her father laid his hand on her prone little head in speechless blessing, while Mrs. Elverton glanced proudly at the handsome couple before her.

"Poor Fred Trevlyn!" she thought. "I wonder if Maude did ensnare him? Well, there is an end of it now."

CHAPTER II.

THE MYSTERY AT THE "ARCHERY."

SLOWLY along the beautiful road the horseman rode, leaving the Grange at his left as he entered the shady avenue that led to his elegant residence.

He had seen her—seen her bow of recognition and returned her greeting, and his heart beat wildly to the tune of his deep love; he had left the spot so sacred, because Maude Elverton hallowed it.

Fred Trevlyn was a noble fellow, one whose society every one courted, and one to whom all persons conceded a peculiar position—a position made by himself, and maintained by his habitual reserve, and entire lack of gallantry and attention to the ladies.

Not that handsome Fred Trevlyn was negligent to women of his acquaintance, for when he did attend the social gatherings in the neighborhood, none created greater *furor* among the ladies than this selfsame wealthy bachelor, for Fred Trevlyn was twenty-seven.

Many matrimonial traps had been set to catch him, but he had stepped quite over the snares, entirely ignoring their existence, until the time had gone by when he was to be caught; yet always was he a welcome guest wherever he went.

For five years had he lived at the Archery, with no companion but his dogs, and no family save the score of servants, the need of whom was doubtful—yet, considering the Archery was of spacious dimensions, and the grounds immense in size, the horses many in number, there might be a good reason, after all, for it.

After a year went by, people began to talk darkly of a mystery at the Archery, and vague, uncertain hints were circulating that a fair-faced lady, as unlike the dark, handsome, stern-faced Trevlyn as possible, was sometimes seen there in closest conversation with him, after which conferences, the master of the Archery would go away for several days; then, on his return, present the impersonation of stormy sorrow.

These rumors often reached Fred Trevlyn's ears, and, on such occasions, he would smile bitterly, and quietly ask "if that was really a fact?"

Every effort to unvail the secret, the mystery of the Archery—if mystery it was—proved futile. Fred Trevlyn would not talk of his private affairs to any one, and his well-trained servants had learned to keep silent.

His had been a strange life—one of deepest shades and brightest tints. He had lived on the mountain-top of joy, hope and comfort; he had dwelt in the valley of disappointment, grief and discontent.

To-day, as he entered his splendid home, he strode straight to his private room, whose shutters were always darkly bowed, and the door ever locked.

Into this room he went now, and, as was his custom, fastened the door after him, then threw

himself on a somber brown lounge that stood between the windows.

"Wretch! worse than brute that I am! and yet for the life of me I am powerless when I see her—tremble like a guilty school-boy if I do but hear her name mentioned."

He covered his eyes with his hands a moment in silence; then his pent-up grief burst forth.

"Why, *why* am I doomed to lead such a life? Why cannot I love whom I please, and throw this fearful shadow from my side, where, for these dark years, it has clung in such persevering gloom? Oh, fool that I was—twice fool that I am, to live and suffer—to live yet die daily!"

His face was ashen pale, and as he arose he dashed from his forehead the great drops of perspiration.

"And I love her—oh, how I love her! with a depth, a force, an intensity that is burning my heart to cinders. Yet I dare not speak, dare not go, like other more favored men, and plead my suit; I must only smother my love for her, and suffer and live on and on in dreary longings worse than Tantalus ever experienced. Oh, my darling, my darling, if I could but call you mine! my angel! my Maude!"

His self-communion had reached an intensity that startled himself, and as the name of his idol was wrung, in anguished tones, from his pale lips, he started, and stood a moment motionless, his hand clenched upon the marble-top stand beside the lounge. Gradually his emotion died away, and then, with bright, glittering eyes, he stepped within a heavy hanging curtained recess, whose folds opened to receive him, then instantly fell tightly together again.

No sound issued from the veiled apartment, and when, ten minutes later, Fred Trevlyn came forth, his brow was calm and clear, his eyes quiet and dispossessed of the raging fire that burned in their dark depths so lately before; he came forth a subdued man, and left the room for his chamber above.

This inner room was the one sacred spot of the Archery; mortal eye, save his own, had never penetrated its hidden mysteries, and if the faint delicious perfumes that occasionally were wafted from this inner apartment were noticed by the servants, they did not dream of its origin.

This afternoon he went to his dressing-room, where the servant met him with a letter.

It was a small white envelope, addressed in a beautifully graceful hand, and his own name was the superscription.

He frowned darkly, and rapid flashes of ominous light gleamed in his eyes as he dismissed the man, and tore open the letter.

As he read, his lip curled scornfully, and a bitter smile played over his face; then a sudden paling swept over his countenance, and he sunk back to his chair, while the strange letter lay unheeded on the rich carpet at his feet.

For several moments he seemed absorbed in thought, then apparently just remembered the missive, for he caught it up quickly, glancing anxiously to the door, as if fearful some one had witnessed his agitation.

Straight through to the end he read, without pause or hesitancy, and then, lighting a match, burned it to ashes, scattering them far and near on the floor.

His writing-desk was open, and he hastily scribbled a note, and without re-reading it, dashed it into an envelope, and directed it.

Calling his groom to bring his favorite Fleet to the door, he drew on his riding-boots, and thrust the letter into his pocket.

An hour's gallop, by a back road, brought the missive in time for the mail.

Despite his better judgment, he resolved on once more passing the Grange. Semi-darkness was fast veiling the landscape, and no one would observe him, while he might once more gaze on the sweet face of the girl he so loved.

With beating heart he drew the reins, and permitted Fleet to walk slowly by.

The curtains were yet up, and by the brilliant illumination within he plainly saw the bright, gorgeous carpet, the elegant furniture and costly paintings. But these were every-day things, no new sights to him, for the Archery was equally splendid. His gaze was riveted upon a group, directly under the glare of the chandelier, and when his mind fully appreciated the truthful import of the the tableau, a cold, dead weight settled on him, and he went dreamily along.

He had seen the handsome stranger placing a ring on his idol's finger; he had seen Maude's bright smile, and witnessed the mute blessing of the proud father.

"Oh, my darling, it is right! I can not complain! I have no right to love you, and you—*you* care nothing for me!"

To his lonely home he went, a sorrowful man, with no kind voice to bid him welcome, no merry face to brighten at sound of his footstep.

With a bitter, half-savage smile, he entered the room, and locked it after him.

CHAPTER III.

A TRUE WOMAN.

It was a charming little cottage, little less than a mile away from the Grange, and covered with creeping roses from chimney to base. Roses with white, creamy and blushing pink hue bloomed in wild abundance, and rendered the fragrant spot a fit home for the blossom who presided over the small household of three, with all the dignity and grace of a matron of thirty-five.

Little Ida Tressel, with her sleeves rolled to the

elbows, as she prepared the flaky pastry that was to tempt her father's waning appetite, was every inch a Hebe as she stood so gracefully poised on one dainty foot, holding aloft the pie-plate in one small brown hand, while with the other she dexterously cut the over-large edges of the brimming pumpkin-pie.

Her cheeks were glowing with health, and her eyes fairly scintillating in her exuberance of spirits, and her father, as he watched her, thought what a darling she was, and Aunt Hetty, the sable house-maid, followed her lithe, nimble figure from oven to dough-trough in pardonable pride.

"There," she said at length, "I believe I'm through. Now for Hetty's nimble hands to clear my litter away. I love to bake, but oh, don't I detest the dish-washing that follows!"

Her happy laugh echoed through the large, old-fashioned kitchen.

"There are two custards, your favorites, father, you know, and two pumpkins, the first we've had this fall. They look splendid, don't they? We ought to save them for company, only we're never troubled with that nuisance." Mr. Tressel, who was confined in doors by his rheumatism, fidgeted uneasily in his chair. At last he found courage to speak, though rather reluctantly.

"Maybe you'd better save them for to-morrow, for we'll have a neighbor in to dinner."

"Who, pray?" and Ida nearly let fall the apron she was untying. "Company for us? Why, who can it be?"

Her father looked out the door, then at the pies.

"Nobody much, child. Only old Andrew Joyce. You needn't go to any trouble."

"I guess I'll not! Old Joyce? Why, father, he is almost a fool! What made you invite him here?" She bent an inquiring look at the old man, who seemed strangely ill at ease.

"You mustn't call him 'old Joyce,' Ida. He's a very rich man, and 's got a splendid house full o' splendid things."

"Just as if that is any recommendation to him! No, indeed, father! He is a disgusting old man, say what you will. Why, he is as old as you."

"No. He is not sixty yet, and that's pretty young—pretty young."

A merry peal of laughter rippled from Ida's red lips.

"Oh, father, Mr. Joyce is evidently trying to befriend you, or wanting you to accommodate him, else why these new and sudden views of 'old Andy,' as the boys call him?"

Her father looked up in her laughing face, and a sigh burst from his lips.

"Andrew Joyce is a good, honest man, Ida, and I believe would do well by anybody, particularly you—"

"Me!" screamed Ida, involuntarily springing from her seat. "What under the heavens can Andrew Joyce want of me? Tell me, father, for I know there is something between you two."

Mr. Tressel leaned back in his chair, both hands grasping the rustic oaken cane he always carried.

For a moment he did not speak, and Ida bent tenderly over him.

"Dear father, if Mr. Joyce asked you to let me superintend his elegant house while the fashionable company from New York is there this season, you need not hesitate to tell me. It will not shock my pride, father," she said, in her sweet way; then adding, "and I am not quite sure but that I would enjoy a visit to the Villa, more than you think I should."

"Would you?" and old Mr. Tressel glanced eagerly up at her. "Would you really like to go to the Villa to live?"

"I could earn money, father, or let Mr. Joyce allow my wages go toward the debt on our dear home," said Ida, softly, as she smoothed the scanty gray locks.

"Then you love this little spot, child, better than any other, even the elegant marble Villa, with the fountains and arbors, and the velvet furniture and costly silver?"

"Father!" and Ida's voice was a trifle reproving. "Didn't mother die in Rose Cottage? didn't little Albert die here? shall not you and I and faithful old Hetty live and die here?"

There were tears in the old man's eyes as she spoke, and he dashed them hastily away.

"Ida," he said, after a moment, his voice husky yet firm, "Ida, have you a lover?"

A burning crimson torrent flooded her fair face, neck and arms, but her answer, so prompt and unhesitating, seemed strangely at variance.

"No, indeed, I have no lover! You know that, father."

Her clear, truthful eyes were raised to his face, and yet in their far-away deeps, old Mr. Tressel fancied he detected other signs.

"You a maiden of twenty, and never yet loved?"

Again the vivid blush, deeper than before, spoke more plainly than words.

This time she made no reply, and her father smiled sorrowfully upon her averted face.

"Then my daughter *does* love, yet has no lover. That is strange."

A sudden gush of tears from her eyes was her assent to her father's remark.

"Who is this man you cannot tell me of?"

"You must not ask me, father; please do not."

With strangely new eagerness, Mr. Tressel insisted on her informing him.

"You are doing very wrong, my daughter, in holding back the name of the one in whom you are so deeply interested. Besides, I have a right to demand his name and position. I will tell you, if you will willingly give me your confidence on this subject, of an offer I have received for you."

Ida's face had colored deeper and deeper, but at mention of an offer of marriage, suddenly paled.

"No one need ask my hand of you," she replied, promptly, "for never will I give it without my heart, and that is bestowed, irrevocably, as you have rightly inferred."

"Who is it, my daughter? I shall not ask you again."

Mr. Tressel looked almost sternly upon Ida's bowed head.

For a moment or so he waited, but no answer came. Then he resumed:

"Whoever it may be, your love is hopeless, for, Ida, I have promised you in marriage."

"Promised me in marriage!" repeated Ida, in startlingly scornful tones. "You have exceeded your right. No one, not my own dear mother, whom you know I loved above all beings, should, were she this moment here, bias me in my marriage relations."

Ida's eyes flashed decisively.

"But, there is immense wealth, a high position, splendid jewels, Ida."

"I care not for them all, unless I love their giver," she replied.

"Your father will end his days in happiness and comfort, if he could but see you the wife of this suitor."

"In Rose Cottage, with me and Hetty to care for you, you will pass your days just as happily and peacefully. Do not indulge in any foolish thoughts of a marriage for me, father, for there is but one man on God's footstool I would marry."

The proud blush on her sweet face strengthened her noble assertion.

"Ida Tressel, you have always been an obedient, affectionate daughter; never in word or deed have you given me occasion to reprove you. To-day I impose my last command upon you; as my loving child, I wish you, nay, I command you, to obey."

Ida arose, and returned his sternly earnest glance.

"You know we owe four hundred dollars on our house, and our creditor declares it must and shall be paid within the month."

He paused to note the effect of his language. Ida was pale, and a trifle angry, but she nodded imperiously for him to continue.

"A certain wealthy man loves you, and wishes to make you his wife, and the mistress of his elegant mansion. You cannot fail of being happy, perfectly happy, and I will save my home, and with Hetty to wait upon me, will live comfortably enough."

"Well? is that all?" asked Ida, when he paused.

"That is all."

"First, then, if old Andrew Joyce insists upon having his money in such an impossible time, do not be worried. We possess a good friend at the Archery, and Mr. Fred will willingly, gladly, loan the amount. Thus Rose Cottage need not be sacrificed."

She ceased, and smiled assuringly.

"Nothing, therefore, remains but for you to convey my respects to my suitor, whoever he be, and with them my positive rejection of him and his overtures."

Having thus peremptorily settled the affair to her own satisfaction, she turned away to her household duties.

"Stay; you never asked me who had made this offer."

Her father caught her arm.

"Because I cared so little. No matter who it is, the answer will apply."

"You shall know—and you must not, you *dare* not refuse. You shall consider it, and when the time comes, let your answer be yes to *Andrew Joyce*."

A stifled scream broke from Ida.

"Never, never! You frighten me, horrify me! You fill me with loathing and disgust! I, the wife of that toothless, deaf, silly old man? Father, you disgrace me, you *insult* me."

She turned almost defiantly back upon him.

He smiled bitterly.

"This is the return you give me for the education I struggled so hard to get you? When your mother and I went hungry to buy you fine dresses, that you might not be ashamed among your companions. This is your thanks, is it? This is what your learning and your religion teaches you?"

The tears sprang to Ida's eyes.

"You wrong me, father. Have I not always obeyed you, and do you not acknowledge it? When, as a father, you bade your child do this, do that, I never rebelled; but when you would bid me bury myself alive, when you command me to shut away all happiness, all joy forever from me, I repeat you exceed your prerogative—you do what no earthly power has a right to do."

Mr. Tressel watched every play of her features as she replied.

"But my word is passed, and Andrew Joyce comes on Sunday to greet you, his betrothed bride, and place the costly diamond on your finger."

"And I solemnly declare that while I am in full possession of my mind and reason, while I am capable of knowing my own heart, I will never, under any circumstances, under any pretense, for any purpose, marry that disgusting man."

She turned indignantly away, and in her own apartment calmed her justly outraged feelings.

CHAPTER IV.

FORBIDDEN SECRETS.

THE days of that glorious sunshiny week were passing pleasantly away to the inmates of the Grange.

George Casselmaine had found his betrothed wife very beautiful, very charming, and very agreeable; yet there lacked *something*—a nameless something—

that made him often wonder why he occasionally wanted to mount his fleetest horse and dash recklessly away over hillside and valley, with the feeling that he was not, after all, the happiest man alive, as he ought to be, with such a lovely fiancée.

A vague thought that this same emotion was experienced by Maude Elverton, when her dreamy, misty eyes would wander from him and gaze so earnestly at the white cupola among the tree-tops, just visible from her favorite western window. And he asked himself if it was possible there was wanting that keen, subtle sensation of first deep love between him and his future bride.

Possibly Maude loved another? Certainly he did not. At any rate, neither adored the other with that ardor which engaged people of a week's time are accused of.

Notwithstanding, George Casselmaine firmly resolved that by no sign of his should Maude or her parents dream that he was not the worshiping lover he seemed. He did like his betrothed very, very much, and he could but admit that a lifetime with her would be a fortunate destiny for any man.

So the time went on, and Maude little knew the secret resolve of Casselmaine, while we must acknowledge that she cast many a wistful glance over the emerald meadows to the gleaming white mansion.

That mansion was the Archery, with its mystery; the one person of whom Maude so often thought was Frederic Trevlyn.

They had not met often—perhaps a half-dozen times; but those brief moments had been of sufficient length to impress indelibly upon Maude's heart the handsome, serious dark eyes, the noble, manly bearing of the stern man who had regarded her so keenly.

But Frederic Trevlyn had never shown by glance or token, that beautiful Maude Elverton was any more to him than a dozen other pretty girls. How well he must have preserved his love a secret the reader may guess.

A succession of brilliant parties, both indoors and out, had followed the arrival of George Casselmaine at the Grange. To these Fred Trevlyn was of course invited, and of course present.

On this evening there was an unusually pleasant gathering at "the Villa," the magnificent country-seat of old Mr. Joyce, whose two step-daughters did the honors of the house.

The music-room was almost deserted, and the lamps were paled before the bright rays of the harvest moon, that flooded the room with its subdued brilliance. Most of the guests were promenading in the garden; but, alone of the gay company, the star, Maude Elverton, had dexterously stolen to this quiet retreat.

She had been there but a few moments when a tall figure appeared in the doorway, who, on seeing her, immediately came forward to the balcony, where she sat.

"You are disposed to be cruel to-night, Miss Elverton."

Fred Trevlyn's voice made her shiver from head to foot, but she replied, gayly and unconcernedly:

"I do not comprehend; am I punishing myself by staying away from the remainder of the guests?"

Quite unconsciously she looked at him, with a sweet timidity that almost unnerved Fred Trevlyn.

"No. You are cruel to your friends, but kind, most kind to me."

A sudden fleet blush mounted her white forehead.

"Miss Elverton, do not misunderstand me when I say how delighted I am to enjoy this interview. I have very few friends, and when with them I can spend a brief moment and forget myself, my life, my past, present and future, I can not be too grateful."

He drew a chair opposite her, and leaned his head against the pillar. Maude glanced furtively at him, and for the first time since they had become acquainted she observed how deep an expression of sad disgust brooded on his handsome face—how dark a shadow rested on his brow—signs that too plainly told that he had in early life drunk to the bitterest dregs, perhaps, the cup of earth's sorrow. And in her heart a pity for him dawned—that dangerous sympathy so near akin to love. And while Maude was thinking of these things, her eyes downcast, her hands idling with a clematis spray, Frederic Trevlyn was eagerly, earnestly reading her sweet face, thinking how unspeakably, inexpressibly dear it was to him, already—how happy the man must be who might bask in the sunlight of her presence—how he would give untold gold might he but win her!

But he dare not think of this. He dare not give his wild imagination play; he, who in earlier, even boyhood days had counted his conquests by dozens, dared not dream even of beautiful Maude Elverton. She could never be aught to him—never, never! He was a doomed man; he was powerless to speak a word of love to her—to any woman!

She was the betrothed of another, so the gossips said, but that was not the barrier between them, for Frederic Trevlyn would never have allowed that to stand between him and his love.

But the wide, impassable gulf between them! He shivered and sickened as he thought that his own hands, ignorantly and innocently, years before, had made that gulf, and now no mortal might bridge it over!

The two sat, little dreaming of each other's thoughts, in the beautiful, tempting moonlight.

"Mr. Trevlyn, you of all men living, the owner of the enviable Archery, the delight of our county, young, fortunate, happy, should be the last to complain of fewness of friends."

"I fortunate? I happy? Surely you can not but be jesting, Miss Maude?"

"I never was more in earnest, Mr. Trevlyn; but I sincerely hope I have not offended you. You looked pained when I spoke."

"You never could offend me, Miss Elverton; and may I tell you that of the few friends, you are the nearest and dearest? Pardon me if I am hasty in saying this."

He leaned nearer her, and she met his earnest, almost impassioned glance.

"I am very glad you do like me," she replied, ingenuously, "and if, in my capacity of friend, I can serve you or alleviate the dark fate you persist in clinging to as inevitable, you must allow me. Will you promise?"

She extended her hand, and he grasped it eagerly, bending to kiss it as he felt prompted to do; but, a strong resolve saved him, and pressing it kindly, let go his hold upon it.

Little did she dream the whirlwind her innocent words had caused.

Poor Fred Trevlyn! how his aching heart throbbed with joy as he had held her hand that brief moment—throbbed with a hopeless joy, insane and intoxicating.

Poor Maude! her heart bounded with a wild, uncontrollable bliss, for she imagined perhaps he loved her! perhaps he would love, if he did not yet!

This was the wanting key-note that George Casselmaine had failed to discover between himself and Maude; this, that was perfectly attuned between Maude and Frederic Trevlyn.

Already the room was filling again with the merry couples, eager for the dance, and Trevlyn led Maude to the floor for the polka redowa. It seemed to them both the perfection of joy; to Maude, who scarcely was able to analyze these new feelings, a new, wild, thrilling joy came when Fred Trevlyn held her so closely to his throbbing heart, and she knew it must be *love* that induced the new emotion.

And he? it was happiness for a time to hang upon her smiles—to watch the lights and shades of her beautiful face—to look into her clear, truthful eyes with his searching, impassioned glance. Bliss too perfect for expression, excepting the thought that it must all end some time, if not that hour, when prudence bade him flee from the temptation.

The music died away, and he and Maude silently went from the room to the balcony again, where they were alone.

Neither spoke; then, with a mighty impulse, he stooped and kissed her forehead.

"Mr. Trevlyn, sir, you forget I am to be George Casselmaine's wife!" and even as she spoke, a great, wild heart-throb leaped to her voice.

"Forgive me. I did know it—I do know it! But I have so few joys, so few comforts, and we are to be friends."

He held out his hands for the pardon he craved. And Maude? She laid her tiny hands within them, and granted the forgiveness.

CHAPTER V.

A FLASH OF LIGHT.

THE ball at the Villa seemed to have been a gayety of Cupid's own making.

The host, old, silly Andrew Joyce, was in raptures over the suddenly appreciated charms of his neighbor Tressel's daughter; while Ida herself loved, hopelessly in secret, a far different personage.

Maude Elverton had discovered that, though her hand had been formally bestowed upon George Casselmaine, her affections were centered on the peculiarly eccentric owner of the Archery, thus leaving George entirely unprovided for. Yet the goddess did not thus neglect one of her prime favorites; for that very day George Casselmaine met his destiny.

A riding-party of Maude and Trevlyn, Casselmaine and the elder Miss Joyce had gone for a pleasure tour far off among the hills. In returning they had come past the Archery, thence toward the Grange. This road, the reader remembers, led directly by Rose Cottage, and that humble, lovely spot he first saw Ida Tressel. Since the morning previous, when her father had commanded her to receive Mr. Joyce as an accepted lover, not a word relative to the subject had passed between them. It was now Saturday, and on the morrow Andrew Joyce was to come to hear his fate; a decision he vainly imagined could not be otherwise than favorable, but which Ida revolted from thinking of, even.

The two days had wrought quite a change in her; they had transformed her from the merry, laughing girl into the more sedate, demure woman, yet upon whom the dignified air sat as gracefully as the more joyous one.

She had resolutely kept from her father the name of the person upon whom she had, unsolicited, poured all her young affections. He had not asked her opinion, and in the fact that no one save herself knew her sweet secret, she rejoiced.

Only a few times had Ida seen this ideal of whom she was so enamored, but, like Maude Elverton, when she first saw Fred Trevlyn, it needed not days or weeks to bring her whole heart, her entire will, to own this dearly loved one, master.

She had gone to her own room—a sweet, tidy apartment, draped in white, and carpeted in green—to commune over the commotion she knew must occur when the morrow came. She had been in her room but a few minutes, when confused cries and a loud, ringing voice calling her name, disturbed her.

Peeping from her blinds, she saw three riders, mounted, Maude Elverton, Frederic Trevlyn, and her especial aversion, Helen Joyce. Beside Mr. Trevlyn was a riderless horse, and across his animal lay a prostrate, unconscious form.

With fairy speed she flew to the rescue; un-

bolted the door, and, calling Hetty, began assisting the ladies to dismount.

Maude was pale, and Helen Joyce much agitated, though she did not fail of flinging a coldly contemptuous look at Ida, who returned it defiantly enough.

"Miss Tressel, please be so kind as to hold my horse, while I dismount and help this poor fellow down."

Fred spoke kindly, and courteously grasped her hand as she came to hold Fleet's bridle.

"Is your companion seriously hurt, Mr. Trevlyn?" she asked, stepping carefully to his side, and lifting the heavy brown curls.

A sharp cry burst from her, and the three guests stared curiously at her.

"Oh, Mr. Trevlyn, he is not dead! Tell me, he can not be dead!"

"Mr. Casselmaine is certainly not dead, Miss Ida, though your screams indicate the grief you experience upon the mere possibility of the event."

He spoke sharply, and with that stern glance her self-reliance returned.

"If you please, Mr. Trevlyn," proudly and indignantly, "you are not the person to control any emotion I may express at such a sight as that."

She lifted the heavy tress again and pointed to a deep, dangerous cut.

"Miss Ida, I indeed beg your pardon a thousand times. Ladies, I fear George has received a more severe injury than we imagined."

Maude gazed in trembling pallor, while Helen Joyce uttered a little nervous cry. Ida alone remained cool, collected.

"Hetty, assist the gentleman to carry the stranger to my room. Ladies, walk in the parlor."

For his very life Frederic Trevlyn dare not disobey the cool command, and without a demur he assisted Casselmaine to the cool, airy chamber above.

Restoratives were tried in vain, and at the expiration of half an hour the patient had not revived, and then Ida left him to Hetty's care while she went to the parlor below.

Maude Elverton and Helen Joyce were sitting at the window, and their escort walking to and fro—his eyes eagerly noting every changing expression of the sweet face before him.

Almost abruptly Ida broke upon them:

"Miss Elverton, your guest is no better; I think I had better send for a surgeon."

Maude paled a trifle; then, by some unaccountable agency, raised her eyes full to Frederic Trevlyn's face. The glance was mutual, and beneath his keen gaze the rich bloom on her cheek deepened to a vivid glow, and she turned to Ida again.

"Thank you, Miss Tressel, and will it be perfectly convenient for George to remain here until Doctor Blake shall consent to his removal? You will confer a great favor."

Maude asked Ida very earnestly, but not so eager as the prompt reply:

"I could not think of having the gentleman disturbed. Hetty and I can attend to him perfectly well; it will be a pleasure rather than a task you seek to impose upon us."

Helen Joyce's keen black eyes smiled scornfully upon her.

It is quite a romance, Miss Tressel, to have a handsome young man helpless in your house, to be waited upon and attended to. I have heard of susceptible young nurses falling in love with their patients, too, haven't you, Miss Elverton?"

Regardless of the pained, angry flush on Ida's face, she went on:

"At the Villa are ample accommodations for sick people, and suitable servants to care for them. It is but a quarter of a mile, we could easily carry him there."

She addressed her concluding remarks to Trevlyn. "Are you sure there are no susceptible nurses at the Villa? Possibly the handsome patient might make some serious inroads there."

He spoke with a quiet irony that nettled Helen.

"Don't flatter yourself, Mr. Trevlyn, that either I or my sister meditate the slightest design on Mr. Casselmaine or his particular friend, the irresistible Mr. Trevlyn."

Fred bowed with profound gravity; then, turning to Maude, addressed her:

"George is your especial property, Miss Elverton; how shall we arrange this affair?"

"I would much rather he would remain quiet and comfortable, as he is, several hours at least. Miss Tressel knows her own business best, and she says it will not incommode her any."

A grateful gleam shot from Ida's eyes at Maude, who little knew its real promptings.

The trio mounted their horses, and returned to the Grange, leaving Casselmaine in the charge of Ida.

Softly she stole to the room where he lay, unconscious and silent. By the bedside she stood, devouring every feature of the calm, noble face, with a devotion that could be prompted but by love alone.

A thrill of indefinable joy swept over her, as she gazed upon him, and, glancing searchingly around, bent over his forehead and kissed him, while the fiery blushes spread over her face at the liberty she had dared to take.

This, then, was the one whom Ida Tressel refused to acknowledge to her father as the only one she had ever, could ever love, Little Ida Tressel—the poor, humble, yet proudly beautiful girl—had fallen in love with George Casselmaine, the rich, aristocratic lover—no, the betrothed husband—of haughty Maude Elverton.

And yet he, her idol, had never seen her. George Casselmaine knew not of Ida Tressel's existence, and when in his moments of yearning for the wanting something that should bind him heart and hand to the one he loved, he little dreamed of the pair of

soft brown eyes that lightened at the thought of him, or the heart that throbbed so wildly when he rode by on the shady roadside.

And Ida Tressel was not alone enamored of the stylish stranger. Another, whose money might be counted by hundreds of thousands of dollars where Ida's was told by pennies, had concluded, that, hereafter, she and Maude Elverton were bitter rivals.

Preposterous as was the idea, Helen Joyce had determined to win George Casselmaine in spite of his beauteous betrothed, and often in her zeal, when Casselmaine, in friendly familiarity, whispered the most commonplace words in her ear, or assisted her to mount or dismount, she believed her end was nearer to accomplishment than she could have hoped. When Ida Tressel had offered so sincerely and hospitably to keep the stranger, Helen Joyce had read her secret in her truthful eyes; and in the rare expressive face she foresaw a rival more potent than Maude Elverton.

But, Fred Trevlyn, who also was aware of Helen's interest in Casselmaine, and who also knew of Casselmaine's utter disregard for her, had spoiled any romantic little plot Helen Joyce might have formed, and the result was as he and Ida desired.

Perhaps had Helen Joyce known, at the moment she directed her impertinent glances at the despised girl, that her old father would be awaiting his destiny at her very lips not a day later, she had acted less scornfully.

But, she was in blissful ignorance.

CHAPTER VI.

THE UNHAPPY MOTHS AND THE FLAME.

THE ride from Rose Cottage, in the society of his idolized Maude, with Helen Joyce on the opposite side of him, was not as delightful as it might have been, and when at the open archway, the two halted, while Helen seemed undecided whether to return home with Maude or not. Fred Trevlyn decided the matter very quickly if not gallantly.

"Good-afternoon, Miss Joyce. Miss Maude and I will not come in, thank you."

Then, touching Maude's pony with his whip, and bowing as his own Fleet darted off, obedient to the touch of the bridle, they galloped away.

It was a perfect afternoon, cool and breezy, and the buoyant atmosphere incited the riders to a longer race than the short distance to the Grange. For several minutes neither had spoken, and then Maude broke the silence.

"Poor George, I do earnestly hope he will recover sufficiently to come home this evening."

"Then his society is so very desirable, I conclude. More so than that of any other mortal."

He laughed savagely, wondering within himself how he had dared say what he had spoken.

Maude looked proudly at him.

"Why should not my future husband be the nearest and dearest of all men?"

Fred Trevlyn reined his horse close beside her, and bent his head to her ear.

"He ought to be, he would be, but you do not love him."

Like lightning she turned upon him.

"You transcend your rights as a friend, Mr. Trevlyn; pray, who gave you your information?"

But a vivid blush was slowly tinting her face, and she felt her companion's dark, passionate eyes reading her own.

"No one told me; my own observation noted it, and my own heart taught me the secret. Maude Elverton, you are not the woman for George Casselmaine!"

He spoke hotly, vehemently.

"Not good enough, perhaps?" asked Maude, half in jest, partly to cover her confusion.

"Maude! how dare you misconstrue me?"

In bitter authority—a power she recognized in every fiber of her being—he spoke, and ere she framed a reply, he burst forth again:

"I repeat it—George Casselmaine is not suited to you, to your wants, or your expectations. You need not only a husband who shall lead, direct and guard you, but you want a lover, who shall cherish, worship and adore you. Your betrothed can not do that; he does not love you as much as another does—one who I know sins in the depth of his love for you, who, if he dare, would be the husband-lover!"

His dark eyes and stern face were tender and loving as he bent so near her crimson cheek, so close he almost heard the wild heart-beat—the throb of purest ecstasy as Maude thought, "He loves me!"

It was fearful ground he was treading on, and he well knew it. But, as stolen sweets are most enjoyed, so did Frederic Trevlyn revel in the enjoyment of an interview he felt was only a bitter tantalization.

For, in the brief moments he spent in Maude Elverton's presence, he partially forgot his sorrow, his chains, the deep gulf between him and his love. He forgot the sacred room at the Archery, and its contents; he forgot all—every thing, save the fierce, hopeless passion for her, and, to-day, from the overcharged depths of his heart, he had said the words that sent such warm thrills all over Maude.

And yet, with the voice of conscience, duty and prudence ringing so loudly in his ears, Frederic Trevlyn would not listen, but madly pursued his rash way.

He had been so unhappy—he reasoned—so miserably lonely until this sweet face flitted across his vision, this lovely charmer came to woo and enslave him. Maude Elverton was the first human being who ever, in all Frederic Trevlyn's life, possessed the power of awakening the master-passion in his heart, to touch the resounding chord of love, which vibrated so fiercely, so ceaselessly.

This, then, the only dream of joy he had ever

known, would come, at last, to a rude awakening. His darling would marry George Casselmaine.

He shivered to the very soul at this thought, and when he looked quickly up, he met Maude's gaze, tender, almost loving, but with a half-savage smile, he started their horses rapidly along.

"One doesn't care to ride slowly along this gloomy road, especially when their escort is as stupid as yours."

Maude might have expected a far different remark than this, so very unlike the last words he had spoken. But Maude Elverton was not the woman to let any man note such a feeling, and eagerly as Frederic Trevlyn read her face, he detected no shadow of what was passing within, and a fierce pang shot through him, half jealous that she did not care for him, half angry that he cared so much for her.

"There is the Archery," and Maude pointed to the cupola glistening among the trees.

"It is a wonder you are not afraid to pass such an ill-spoken-of place, at dusk, too. Most ladies avoid it, as though it were peopled with hobgoblins instead of human beings like myself, but not much better than fiends, after all."

"Why, Mr. Trevlyn, how you speak! Making such sport of your elegant home, and comparing yourself to a fiend!"

Maude's answer was quickly and indignantly uttered, and she raised her eyes fearlessly to his.

He smiled in his own peculiar winning way; a rare smile, and one as rarely indulged in; one which, despite herself, brought a flush to her face as she turned her eyes away.

"Then you admire the Archery, and do not think me quite a demon?"

"I have considered you a friend, Mr. Trevlyn, and is not that proof I do not regard you in such a wicked light?"

"Then you regard me wrongly, Maude Elverton. I am a wicked man, whose greatest sin is my only joy. You may well look confounded at my language, but it is true—too true."

He paused, evidently awaiting an answer, but none came.

"I know not why I am prompted to speak of these things to you, unless my evil genius, who is ever present, urges me on, but certain it is I am strongly inclined to tell you my troubles, my griefs—no, pardon me; I have forgotten myself."

He bowed coldly—this strange, inexplicable lover of hers—and, as Maude stole a glance at his stern, stormy face, she saw the fixed expression of stony grief, so near akin to despair, that she pitied him tenderly.

"Mr. Trevlyn, tell me, I beg. That you are laboring under a severe agony of mind, I easily see and deeply regret. Please confide in me, my friend; perhaps a *confidante* will relieve your feelings. I think I can sympathize with you."

Unconsciously she laid her hand on his arm, and looked imploringly in his face. He turned away, by a mighty effort, for the temptation pressed him strongly.

Maude Elverton's warm, life-giving touch on his arm; her sweet face beseeching the story he dared not tell, and could scarcely conceal! It was almost madness, yet the words trembled on his lips; had not his good angel intercepted, Maude Elverton would have heard the words her heart was so earnestly craving, and he himself would have been deeper sunk in sorrow and remorse.

"I thank you," and his tones were low and gentle, "but I dare not! You lay your hand in all confidence in mine, now, and call me friend. Did you know my wickedness, my sin, you would hate me, and your hate would be to me worse than death."

Again the lightning-flash of unrestrained delight thrilled over Maude, but she gently removed her arm. For a moment she was silent, then, ere she could reply, Frederic addressed her:

"As true friends, dear friends, I hope we will part to-day. After to-day I will not meet you often. I can not, I dare not!"

With a haughty bow, Maude answered him, while the angry blood rushed to her brow.

"Thank you, sir. Our roads diverge here. Good afternoon."

She touched the lash to her horse, and bounded down the Grange road, but not quicker than Frederic followed.

"No," he said, grasping the bridle, and bringing them face to face, "we will not part thus. Listen, Maude Elverton, and look in my face. Does not your heart tell you *why* I say we must not meet? Does not your heart bear witness to what I dare not say, and what you dare not hear?"

She did not remove her eyes from off his face, until the last words were spoken; then, with a sudden movement, wrenched herself from his hand, so hot and trembling.

There ensued a silence, and Maude's heart throbbed almost audibly. Never before had Frederic Trevlyn suggested his love so plainly, and now she thought he referred to her betrothal to George Casselmaine, as the impassable barrier to his love for her. Like a sudden flash of light came the thought, that her lover, her *rightful* lover, was not the one who wore her ring, who would call her wife, when the summer came again. She *knew* Fred Trevlyn loved her, and she *knew* she loved him. She had heard how cold, repellent and haughty the handsome owner of the Archery was, and how no woman ever succeeded in winning a smile of love or word of affection from him. And from all this ice-bound sea of coldness and sternness, the love for her had come, a rushing, mighty torrent that naught might stay. *She*, she was the recipient of this love, the object of this passion! and the flush deepened on her cheek at the thought.

"Well?" he asked, gently.

His voice, loving and beloved as its tones were, recalled her to herself, and with a fierce, almost stern voice, she answered him. And her answer saved him.

"Mr. Casselmaine, my future husband, certainly will not object to my friend, Mr. Trevlyn, calling as usual at the Grange."

Was he awake? Could it be possible this was Maude, his darling, speaking so cruelly, so entirely disregarding of the meaning of his question? He looked earnestly at her, but her sweet face gave no sign of the fierce tumult within. He drew a breath of relief, and yet tinged with exquisite grief.

"I have but one request to ask. Promise me never to give George Casselmaine up. Promise, Maude Elverton! Your sacred promise alone will save me from eternal ruin!"

Eagerly, wildly he scanned her face.

"I shall certainly marry George Casselmaine. Are you satisfied?"

So strangely at variance with his words but a short time before, when he told her George Casselmaine could never be the husband she would need, he seemed madly delighted with her reply.

"God bless you, Maude Elverton! You have saved me—have saved yourself."

He caught her hand, and covered it with hot kisses; then, stooping suddenly, pressed one long kiss on her lips.

"I shall not ask your pardon; I do not desire your forgiveness, but I will not repeat the offense—never, alas! never!"

The tears sprang to her eyes, but she dashed them away, just as they paused by the Grange gate.

Frederic turned abruptly away, and without a word or bow, galloped home.

Almost listlessly, certainly very wearily, Maude entered the house, to apprise her parents of the accident to their guest.

CHAPTER VII.

NURSE AND SOMETHING.

In the shady, airy bedroom, George Casselmaine lay; the physician had seen him, and pronounced him not dangerously hurt, but too exhausted by the shock of his fall to venture from his present quarters for a while—before the next day at the earliest.

Consciousness had returned, and he was scanning with interest the objects before him. He perfectly remembered the ride, and wondered, with bitterness, if his betrothed were in the house to attend upon him, or whether he were left to the tender mercies of the country folks who dwelt in the house.

He finally decided that some one in the dwelling was refined, for the dainty little pictures that adorned the walls, the spotless lace curtains of the windows, the neat muslin screen attached to the wall before the wash-stand, ornamented with the bright blue rosettes, the bouquet of flowers on the bureau, all spoke plainly that some refined taste had arranged all this.

A lady must have occupied the room, he further concluded, for behind the door hung a pink muslin dress (whither hasty hands had deposited it), and the lady must be pretty, for the tiny slipper by the bedside, the small gloves that the half-opened drawer disclosed, all bespoke beauty.

He smiled rather scornfully, as he closed his eyes languidly, at the romantic idea of estimating an unknown person's beauty by such peculiar tests.

She might have small hands and tiny feet, and a head of softest brown hair, and wear the daintiest of pink dresses, and yet the skin might be coarse and thick, the eyes ugly and cross, and the figure ill-proportioned.

But what did it matter to him? What need he care about the owner of the neat little room he occupied? He had no right to be building air-castles and peopling them with beautiful maidens whom he would have loved with all the ardent intensity of his nature.

He sighed, and thought of Maude Elverton—beautiful, enchanting and refined, possessing every qualification his wife should possess, except the one consideration of a love that was from the soul.

To George Casselmaine, a marriage without this love was a mockery to which he could not, would not consent. Not that he entertained the most remote idea of giving up his beautiful Maude, but he determined to grow to love her; and when the time came that he could in all truth claim her as his wife, the marriage might be solemnized, and never till then.

Rather than *learn* to love, George Casselmaine wished it might have burst upon him at once. He wished, when he first saw her, the right feeling had come, and this was what his heart was starving for, the while he was nobly striving to cultivate the coy passion.

His thoughts were assuming a serious import, and he was growing restless and impatient, when, suddenly, the door opened.

He was so entirely unprepared for the vision that burst upon him, that he cared not to restrain the exclamation that rose to his lips, and a bright smile welcomed his attendant as she blushing advanced to his side.

Ida extended her hand cordially.

"You have awakened, I perceive, sir. You feel much better, do you not?"

"Thanks to some one's skillfulness, yes; and that 'some one' I believe is yourself. Is it not?"

Ida smiled pleasantly.

"I certainly attended to you, but how skillfully I cannot say."

"And to whom am I thus everlastingly indebted?"

The admiring, withal courteous glance sent the wild blood to her face as she answered,

"I am Ida Tressel."

"Ida Tressel!"

Unconsciously his lips repeated the name.

"I will confess so sweet a name surprises me in this country place."

His winning smile and gentle tones were making sad inroads on Ida's heart, but she bravely smothered every shadow of her feelings.

"What must you think then of the title of the dwelling you are in? We call it 'Rose Cottage.'"

"Ida Tressel of Rose Cottage! I shall never forget that. I think it is the sweetest sound I ever heard."

George Casselmaine spoke truthfully, and Ida's face blushed with pleasure.

"I have prepared a light lunch for you, sir, and if you are ready I will bring it up."

"All ready, except that I'll have some water and a napkin first. I'm rather dusty."

Ida poured from the water-vase a basin of cool water, and set it on a chair by the bed; then hung a clean, perfumed towel beside it.

With a careless movement, George arose to a sitting posture, and essayed to turn back his cuffs, but a sudden faintness seized him, and, his face as ashen as death, he was forced to lie down again.

In a moment the giddiness passed away, and looking toward Ida, he smiled mischievously.

"Miss Tressel, you will pardon my presumption in daring to suggest such a thing, but really I am unable to bathe my face."

She hesitated a moment, just as Hetty entered the room.

"Aunt Hetty can assist you," she said, pointing to the sable attendant who carried the tray of edibles.

George cast an imploring glance at her which said, plainly as looks might say—he much preferred Ida's ministry. But, she was dumb to his glance, and, as Aunt Hetty deposited the waiter on the stand, was about to request her assistance. But Casselmaine superseded her.

"Miss Tressel, if it is not too much trouble, would you please help me bathe my face?"

His eyes were beaming with a merry twinkle, and a mischievous smile parted his lips.

Ida blushed, and then smiled, then comprehending the ludicrous situation, laughed aloud.

"Please grant me this one favor, dear Miss Tressel."

Ida's heart beat tumultuously, but she calmed herself, and, gravely and sweetly, with not the faintest show of merriment, proceeded to bathe his face and hands.

As her hands lingered around the waving hair that curled over the white forehead, she shivered in spite of herself. How could it be otherwise?

Here was her ideal, on whom she was lavishing all her heart's affection, comparatively helpless under her hands; his handsome face smiling so kindly in her eyes, and his own dark eyes beaming so merrily. True, there was no suspicion of love in George Casselmaine's demeanor, but Ida felt sure he did not dislike her, and that was a delight. So her hands wandered caressingly, lingeringly perhaps, in the thick waving hair, and she reluctantly declared her task accomplished.

"No! you are not through!" he asked, and Ida imagined she detected a shade of disappointment on his face.

"I am. Will you have the glass to see if all is right?"

She would have gone for the little hand-mirror on the toilette stand, but Casselmaine suddenly detained her.

"No, Miss Tressel," and he caught both her hands, while a rich bloom tinted her cheeks; "no; you shall tell me if I look well. Do I? Are you satisfied with me?"

"Was she satisfied?" how that innocent question made her quiver. *Satisfied* with George Casselmaine? But she raised her lids, and glanced timidly at the handsome invalid.

"I am perfectly satisfied, sir. Your hair is arranged very becomingly, I think."

"Let me see for myself, please."

He looked earnestly in her eyes, so flooded with the love-light in their depths; he looked eagerly, and when she could no longer return his searching glance, with a faint cry she buried her scarlet cheeks in her hands. Casselmaine detained one hand.

"Miss Ida, I beg your pardon. I was cruel, barbarous, to tax your modesty, to try your patience so. Forgive me, my kind nurse, my little attendant, will you?"

His smile was bright—his tones earnest, but, Ida saw not the one, if she heard the other. She only knew that perhaps he had read her secret in her tell-tale eyes; and that were worse than never being loved!

"Look at me for a single moment, and I promise not to offend again."

He placed his hand under her chin and gently raised her face, so their eyes met.

"You forgive me, freely forgive my rudeness? and will grant me a great favor to prove my unreserved pardon?"

"I shall think nothing of it," she murmured, striving to appear indifferent.

"Thank you, thank you; but the boon I crave is, that you will condescend to regard me as a friend, one who may by friendly acts atone for this one ungentlemanly deed. May I call you my friend—will you acknowledge me yours?"

A thrill of wild rapture filled Ida's heart, that fluttered and throbbed in her glad emotion. Without a word she extended her hand. Casselmaine grasped it cordially, and the compact was sealed.

George and Ida were to be friends.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MAIDEN'S SCORN.

The intervening days had passed, and Sunday had come, when Ida's gray-haired suitor was to make his proposals. George Casselmaine had two days before returned to the Grange, leaving the sweet memory of his brief stay at Rose Cottage, for Ida's solace, and carrying with him a small vignette of hers, which he had insisted on retaining as a souvenir of the pleasant episode in his life, no less than a memento of their mutual friendship. He had gone to Maude again—only to dream of his charming nurse.

And Ida, in a state semi-joyous, equally wretched, awaited his coming again; but, meanwhile prepared to meet Andrew Joyce.

The long, warm autumn afternoon was slowly passing on, and Mr. Tressel and Ida were quietly sitting in the little vine-shaded porch, their usual place of *siesta* on those lovely summer-days.

"My child," spoke her father, "our guest comes; welcome him as becomes us."

The tottering old man stepped on the porch, a foolish smile of gallantry playing on his withered lips as he reached his hand to Ida, with the other clutching the gold-headed cane, without which he was powerless.

A scornful expression of her face answered his salutation, and she remained silent.

"Sit down, neighbor, sit down. Ida will wheel the easy-chair up for you."

Mr. Tressel darted a reproving glance at his daughter's cold, proud face.

"Never mind, my beauty. To be sure I am no gay young lover coming a-wooing, but the gold in my pocket will balance all that, eh?"

His dim blue eyes sought Ida's, but with a gesture of disgust she turned away.

"Ida," spoke her father, sternly, while Mr. Joyce endeavored to assume an air of profound dignity, "the time for silly trifling has gone by. You well know the object of Mr. Joyce's visit here to-day, and he knows you are aware of it. He comes to repeat to you what he said to me; he comes to hear from you what I have promised him."

Proudly stern, Ida listened to her father's words, and replied by a careless nod, and a slight smile of contempt.

"Yes, sweet Ida, I come for the express purpose of offering you my hand and heart; one full of gold and jewels for my lovely bride, the other full of love for my charming wife."

He bowed respectfully, while a sickening shiver ran over her frame.

"You do not reply," he continued, softly. "I will add, I have the full, free consent of your father, who has further sworn to keep his word—that you should be Mrs. Joyce. When I am made happy by addressing you so, the great study of my life will begin—to make you happy, to gratify your slightest wish. I love you fondly. Will you be my wife?"

"Never, never!" cried she. "I never will wreck my happiness by binding my young life to yours; I despise, I hate you!"

"Be silent, till you can use choicer language," angrily commanded her father.

"Do not mind her; it is only maiden coyness," said old Andrew Joyce, endeavoring to reconcile the two.

"It is not," she replied, sternly. "Maiden coyness has no affinity with aged imbecility. When an old, decrepit man of seventy seeks to marry a girl of not a third his years, womanly anger takes the place of maiden coyness. Again I repeat, you had better keep your overtures for some one more anxious for the gold and jewels you seem so determined shall buy you a wife."

Her eyes flashed fiercely, and she confronted both the old men, while old Aunt Hetty pitied her from her far-off seat in the little back kitchen.

"Your father has passed his word, and he will not break it. When once I have the right to call you mine, you will learn how kind and loving I am, and you will never repent your choice."

"I shall never repent, for I shall not commit any thing worthy of repentance. My father may promise me to whom he sees fit, but, it remains for me to fulfill that promise, which, rest assured, Mr. Joyce, will never be done by me."

Mr. Tressel arose, enraged, from his seat.

"You shall be more reverent; I command it. You shall tell your suitor what I have told him."

"Do not reproach me, father. I mean no disrespect for you. I, alone, am the insulted one, who will stand up for my rights."

"Pray, Miss Ida, listen, and let me tell you how dearly the old man loves you—"

"Be silent, sir," she commanded, imperiously. "Your language inspires me with horror, with disgust. You are not a man, or you would cease your unwelcome, importunate avowal. No man with any spirit would pursue a woman with such distasteful protestations."

Proudly and with innate dignity she looked at the bent form before her.

"I have enough spirit to continue to strive for the treasure I swear I shall obtain," he replied, angrily, clenching his fist on the arm of the chair.

She gestured him away, and then turned to withdraw to her room.

"No, Ida Tressel, you disobedient child, you shall hear me. You dare not reject this offer."

"What! I dare not bestow my love upon whom I will?"

"No. Your old, infirm father, who has worked and toiled these three-score years for you, commands you instantly to accept your suitor. By the authority of a parent, I beseech you."

Ida smiled in supreme disdain. "No earthly

power, nor human ingenuity is able to coerce me in this affair. I never shall, never can, be persuaded to marry old Andrew Joyce."

Like an enraged lioness she exultingly confronted her father and their guest.

"One moment, if it please you, my dear young lady. May I speak? I would beg to know if you have a prior engagement which is the obstacle between us?"

A vivid blush mantled Ida's brow, but she did not deign to reply. Her father answered for her.

"She loves, but has no lover, sir."

His sarcastic words, the cutting tone in which they were spoken, stung her to the quick, and she turned fiercely upon them, her face aglow.

"Since you inform your guest so far, allow me to confess the entire truth. Know you, then, Andrew Joyce, that I do love another with all the passion of my soul. I will die loving him, whether I am beloved or not."

Her sweet face was lighted by the holy fires within, and she seemed glorified as she told her ardent love for her idol.

"Poor girl, poor girl," muttered Joyce. "I can appreciate your feelings—"

"You appreciate—*you!*" she retaliated, scornfully. "The man who is old enough to be my great-grandfather, whose youngest daughter is ten years older than I! You appreciate!"

Mr. Joyce smiled compassionately.

"Such overwhelming affection must be a fairy tale. This confession is a falsehood, then, for you told me but a few moments before you would never marry."

"I referred to yourself, sir. I shall never marry, unless it is the one I love. I have told you my final, unalterable decision. I shall not allow so loathsome a subject to annoy me again."

With a courtesy she left the room.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SCORNED WIFE.

THE Quaker City had just fallen into the first sound doze on a cool, starry September night, and the windows of the elegant bazars on Chestnut street were long since closed. Lights were extinguished in the elegant mansions on the aristocratic uptown streets, save where at intervals a solitary watcher kept guard over the couch of illness.

The train from New York had arrived an hour before, and the passengers reached their destinations. The spacious Kensington depot was occupied by but one of the hundreds that lately increased the bustle there.

The one passenger was a gentleman, tall, handsome, and commanding, who motioned to a cabman.

"Drive to Arch street, number —."

Tossing his overcoat within the cab, and following with his hand-valise, he closed the door, bade the driver go on, and reclined on the cushions, while the cab hurried onward.

With a lurch that aroused him, so violent was it, he gazed from the window. The cab had drawn up to a large, imposing residence, whose stately front frowned in unrelieved darkness. No ray of light was visible, and as he cast a hasty glance from basement to roof, a bitter smile darkened his features.

Without a word, he thrust a bill in the cabman's hand, and with coat and sachel in hand, ascended the steps.

He did not try the door, for, of course, at that hour of the night every door was securely fastened, but from his vest-pocket he took a tiny key which he fitted, and opened the heavy walnut door.

A faint light in the chandelier in the hall illumined the splendid decorations of the broad, low staircase, the frescoed walls, the statuary in the niches, the velvet-carpeted floor. Beyond the ground-glass doors, draped with costly lace, which stood slightly ajar, he saw the massive sideboard, fraught with its precious weight of silver and glass. The view was a beautiful one, but it was only a quick, scornful glance he deigned to bestow, and hanging his overcoat on the ebony rack, and leaving his valise and hat beside it, the stranger ascended the stairs. The soft Aubusson carpet gave back no sound of his footfall, and, silent and unseen, he continued his way.

From the door of the front chamber a light gleamed through the keyhole. To this door he went. He turned the knob; it offered no resistance, and he entered the splendid apartment.

By the window, over whose plate-glass panes heavy orange-satin curtains were let down, sat a lady, deeply engrossed in reading.

She smiled as she read, all unconscious of the presence frowning so grimly upon her; and when she smiled she seemed transfigured, so gloriously did her features lighten.

She was otherwise scarcely beautiful, though not plain. She had an oval face, and her hair was brushed gracefully off the white forehead. The cheeks wore a pale carmine tint; the lips were scarlet and haughty. Her dress was a white *negligé*, of fine, soft Indian muslin, and trimmed with cobweb laces.

Upon this fair tableau the intruder gazed, and the frown darkened on his brow. She did not heed it, and read on in blissful unconsciousness. He advanced rapidly, and laid his hand on the book.

"Clare?"

She started, as though frightened, but when she saw him, her fear turned to delight, and she sprung from her chair.

"Frederic, my darling!"

She laid her hands on his breast, but he removed them, and led her to the chair she had just vacated.

"You know I dislike such demonstrations. Please discontinue them in the future."

A pained expression came over her features, but she made no reply.

For several moments they stood confronting each other. Then he spoke:

"Doubtless you were surprised to see me so unexpectedly; but the old excuse is again offered."

Clare raised her eyes a moment, looking full in his face.

"Frederic, will the time never come when peace and love are restored between us? Must our lives ever be passed in this awful mockery, ever apart?"

She gazed tenderly upon his cold, handsome face, and a bitter smile broke over his features.

"Never! Your own hand did the deed; your own heart must bear the consequences."

He smiled proudly.

Clare uttered a cry of anguish.

"My heart alone, Frederic? Am I the only victim of this unhappy marriage? Does not *your* heart ever long for the happy days by-gone? Oh, my husband, must I bear this load alone? Pity me, pity me, and love me, be it ever so little!"

She raised those tender eyes, love-lit through the mists of grief, in earnest imploration.

"Do not enact this scene again, Clare. Whenever I come, the tableau is the same. Do you wonder I come not oftener?"

Frederic Trevlyn folded his arms as he stood before her.

"I received your letter last week, and I would have come before, had not other affairs detained me. Now I am here, ready to do your bidding, as a husband should do."

For a moment a sarcastic light gleamed in Clare Trevlyn's eyes, but she bowed respectfully.

"I will hear my husband's will."

A vial of scornful indignation was centered in the one word, and Frederic felt it, but too proud to resent it, he proceeded:

"I can tell you my commands in a few words. I never wish to see you at the Archery again."

An enraged blush mantled her face, and she turned proudly to him.

"You have no authority to order your *wife*, your lawfully-wedded wife, the mother of your child—dead and an angel though she be—from your door. You dare not, you *shall* not! I protest against it! At the Archery or in the Philadelphia mansion, I am mistress. Remember, my name is Mrs. Frederic Trevlyn, and no human power can divest me of my rights and privileges!"

Frederic Trevlyn looked coolly on her, so glowing and animated.

"That is false," he said, quietly and calmly.

"You wear my name, you are called my wife by the few who know us. You are truly mistress of your mansion here, for I gave it to you. You were my wife once, Clare, my loved wife; you are my little dead daughter's mother. I never shall forget that; and for her sake it is that I tolerate you enough to hold an acquaintance with you. But beyond these chains, you are not my wife. You never shall be."

His language, though decided, was not harsh. His tones, though firm and stern, were not malignant, and Clare Trevlyn knew he meant every syllable he uttered.

Her cheek paled, and she trembled like an aspen.

"No, Frederic! Unsay those cruel words! Remember our early wedded life; remember how happy, how trusting you were then. You loved me *then*, my husband."

Like music, sung by the siren of the fatal rocks, her low, liquid voice came to his ear, and her beautiful, melting eyes gazed affectionately in his own.

Clare Trevlyn had charmed him once, but her time had passed.

"Never call me husband again, I command you!" he replied, almost fiercely, shaking her soft white hand from his arm.

His words stung her to madness, and she answered in her anger:

"And you, whom the world thinks an enviable man, whom mammas and daughters look covetously upon—you, whose wife is disgraced, dishonored—can enjoy your freedom, your pleasure; can visit beautiful ladies, and whisper love-words in their ears."

"Clare!"

Frederic Trevlyn fairly thundered the name. His face grew white with an ill-suppressed passion as he proceeded:

"How dare you mention this subject? Remember, never another word on this matter."

"You have not the power to silence me! I will speak, and inform you that my love, earnest though it was, can turn to hate! I can punish you, if I am what you declare you 'hate' and 'despise!'"

She paused to await his reply, but he sternly regarded her in contemptuous silence. She spoke again, now wooing and humble.

"Frederic, I am angry; I am saying what I should not say. Forgive me, and, oh, I pray you, love me again. Only let me be your happy wife again, and I will compass the wide earth to please you, to delight you. See, Frederic! Clare is penitently suing for your pardon and love!"

She knelt humbly before him, but he motioned her away.

"Never, never! the hateful bands that unite us shall remain the same; if I wear the galling chains, they shall clank around your neck also. We will not be divorced, but we are not a married pair. You shall be answerable for every hour of sorrow and anguish you have forced upon me; you shall live here alone, secluded, to meditate on your sinfulness. Remove your arms; they pollute me. We are not even friends; we are strangers."

He snatched his foot from her hand, and with a contemptuous bow, withdrew.

CHAPTER X.

AT THE COTTAGE.

GEORGE CASSELMARINE had been brought to the Grange again in Doctor Elverton's easiest carriage. Mrs. Elverton hovered solicitously about the lounge whereon he lay, which the doctor had insisted should be wheeled to the pleasant spot in whichever room the family used for the time. Maude tended him carefully and kindly, anticipating his every wish, and enacting the tender betrothed most devotedly.

Despite these attentions from every member of the household at the Grange, Casselmaine's thoughts were too often reverting to the fairy nurse at Rose Cottage. Of Ida he dreamed, sleeping; of Ida he mused, waking, until he was terrified to find what a deep interest he felt in her—until he was grieved to learn that he loved her better than Maude.

The quickly recurring days brought him his strength and wonted health, and as soon as he was able to endure the fatigue he went straight to Rose Cottage. Ida was charming as ever, in her plain white Marseilles, and a vivid pink rosebud at the neck, and as the bloom on her cheek deepened when he entered, it caused a corresponding gleam of joy in his own bright eyes.

"I come to report, Miss Ida,"—he had so soon adopted the formal title—"as it becomes a thankful patient to do. Your good care did wonders for me."

He reached his hand cordially toward her.

"I am glad to hear it. I suppose you mean the 'bath' when you refer to the 'good care' bestowed upon you?"

Her merry eyes sought his own fearlessly; then, before the ardent, admiring glance, she blushed.

"Certainly I included that. I never enjoyed anything in my life more."

Ida dared not tell him that she thought the same, so she played carelessly with the tassel of the linen shade, endeavoring to recall her self-possession.

George Casselmaine, with an effort, removed his eyes from her sweet, blushing face.

"Are they well at the Grange?"

She asked the commonplace question, for the silence grew awkward.

"Perfectly well."

His reply gave not the least thread to another question, and she twirled the tassel desperately.

"What shall I say to entertain him? how can I think of the silly little remarks with which fashionable women entertain their guests?" she thought. Then, by a sudden inspiration, she determined to converse of their mutual friend, Maude.

Ida desired to hear him speak of her for a twofold reason. One, to learn whether he really loved her; the other, to see if beautiful Maude loved him.

"I presume Miss Elverton has proved a most efficient attendant during your convalescence, Mr. Casselmaine?"

"She deserves credit, certainly; but her services were in no wise preferable to that of the first nurse into whose hands I fell."

George had an excuse for reading her face again, which he did, filled with a strange joy as he noted the flush on her cheeks.

"Tell me all about it," he continued. "It is a pleasant incident to me. Indeed, I almost wish the affair would transpire again."

"There is very little to tell, indeed, except that Mr. Trevlyn brought you into the house, and I came, with Hetty, to the rescue. Miss Maude and Miss Joyce returned with Mr. Trevlyn for the surgeon."

A new light shone in his eyes, and he asked, almost eagerly, if Maude did not remain a while at least.

"She stayed until her further services were unnecessary. She was very kind, indeed, Mr. Casselmaine, and insisted on having you taken immediately to the Grange."

"And who demurred, Miss Ida?"

With more than friendly kindness he leaned near her, awaiting her answer.

"Mr. Trevlyn objected most decidedly, and I was only too glad to have you remain here."

The slight frown on his brow when she began to speak, cleared away at her last words.

"Then, although you dared not demand that my safety required me to go no further, you were pleased when it was decided I should tarry with you?"

His dark, earnest eyes were looking straight at hers.

"Yes, I was glad, and I am glad still."

Her heart throbbed as she made this bold answer, and Casselmaine's beat faster when he replied:

"Thanks, Ida; now I know we are friends indeed."

He pressed her little hand caressingly. Ida's pulse bounded wildly. He had called her "Ida," he had held her hand. Surely he did like her a little; and the warm flush of joy lighted her eyes, and rendered her more beautiful than ever.

And George Casselmaine, as he watched the emotions of her mobile countenance, grew momentarily to loving her more and more. But, while he chided himself for the love he knew he was cherishing where another should have been encouraged, he excused himself with the thought that he was strong enough to burst the fetters when the proper time of decision came.

So Ida, in the warmth and fullness of her heart, allowed her affections to twine about him.

They were sitting by the window, both silent. Ida gazing abstractedly beyond the little garden, and George watching her. Suddenly she seemed to pale, then uttered a little cry.

"What is it that frightens you?"

Casselmaine sprang from his seat, and looked anxiously around.

A faint smile played over her lips as she answered: "Nothing, nothing, I assure you. I am very foolish, very silly. You will think I am affecting airs."

She laughed as she spoke, but the pallor of her face did not escape his eye.

"You are miserable," he returned, gravely. "Some object has passed the window that fills you with alarm or horror. I am your friend, Ida. Will you not tell me?"

"I have nothing to tell, Mr. Casselmaine. Indeed I am very silly, and that will surely content you."

She looked laughingly from her bright eyes, and the brilliant carmine returned to her lips again.

"A special admirer of yours passed at the moment you spoke, Mr. Casselmaine; perhaps a sight of her terrified me."

"An admirer of mine, Ida? Who, pray?"

He glanced anxiously down the road at the carriage that was nearly out of sight. It was not the Grange carriage, and he breathed freer. What would the Elvertons say to see him, their daughter's betrothed, in such a place in company with the poor girl of Rose Cottage?

"Helen Joyce," she answered, darting a merry glance at him, yet watching its effect.

His lip curled contemptuously; then he suddenly caught Ida's hands.

"Look at me a moment. Do you think I like that woman?"

His dark eyes were steadily searching her own; but she answered lightly:

"How am I supposed to know? She is a very fine young lady, they say."

He flung her hands away, and then threw himself down in the rocking-chair.

"Ida Tressel, you are a curious girl."

"Why so? Didn't I answer you correctly?"

"Did you answer me at all? Didn't you ask me another question?"

Ida's gay laugh rung out on the cool autumn air.

"Oh, sir, I verily believe you are in love with Helen Joyce, and are afraid she may hear of it. But, indeed, I will not tell her."

She regretted her careless speech the moment she uttered it, for with flashing eyes he arose and confronted her.

"You know that Miss Joyce has no particular attraction for me."

"I spoke thoughtlessly; pardon me, and let us be friends again?"

The sweet persuasiveness of her voice subdued him, and he extended his hand.

"Pardon me, Ida. And now lest my host should consider me remiss in staying so long away, I must return. But promise me I may come again."

"Yes, come again. Rose Cottage will ever open a welcome door to you."

"And its sweet mistress a welcoming hand?"

He had almost said "heart," but she did not know it.

He bowed and left the house, and Ida gazed wistfully after him until he was lost to view.

CHAPTER XI.

A WIFE'S LOVE.

THE elegant mansion on Arch street was a blaze of light. Its haughty mistress detested darkness and gloom, and for a few days past her imperious edict had been issued to the well-trained, respectful servants that as soon as the first night-shadows deepened, every room should be brilliantly illuminated.

Through the lace-curtained windows might be seen the fairy scene within, the long suites forming one blazing sea of light, gold, crystal. The furniture was surpassing beautiful in its golden and satin elegance; the tables were of rich inlaid wood, the cabinets of *verde antique*. The paintings were most exquisite, the statuary the rarest, the numberless little articles of *vertu* the costliest that decorated any residence far or near.

And amid all this luxury the lone woman, who was mistress of it all, stood, clad in robes of magnificence, defiantly proud and fascinating.

Clare Trevlyn had been deeply wounded when her husband came to her, on that evening when we introduced her, and her heart still quivered from the fierce blows Frederic Trevlyn had struck. But she had resolved to pursue her own course, and now she smiled sternly at her lovely face in the mirror, as she thought over her plans.

She stepped to the speaking-tube.

"Send Esther to me."

Her melodious voice echoed down the long distance, and in a moment a low tap answered her.

In obedience to the silence which followed, a sign of Mrs. Trevlyn's that she was ready to receive her servants into her presence, the door opened, and the woman summoned entered.

She was a fleshy, good-looking, amiable, harmless-looking woman, whose black silk dress and neat lace cap bespoke her of the higher order of servants. And indeed she was, as the conversation between lady and maid proved.

"Close the door and turn the key, Esther. I desire to talk on private and important matters, which no one living must know but you and I. You understand?"

Mrs. Trevlyn nodded questioningly.

"I do comprehend, exactly. I am to hear everything, yet know nothing."

Esther understood her ground well.

"Precisely; we have shared many a secret, Esther, before I was Mrs. Trevlyn, and you plain Esther Waring—the rich Mrs. Trevlyn's housekeeper. You remember those early, happy days, I suppose?"

"Indeed, I do; and all too well. How the proud, handsome gentleman came riding to the tumble-down cottage to court you."

Esther's face clouded over as she spoke.

"He was handsome, Esther, and proud, too; and he is yet."

Mrs. Trevlyn tried to smooth the frown from her companion's brow.

"Proud and handsome he may be, yet what does his beauty count for when he treats *you* so shamefully—"

"Hush, Esther. I cannot allow you to disparage my husband's conduct. Remember I am his wife."

There was a sweet dignity in Clare's tones that fell reprovingly on Esther's ears, but it failed to quell the storm of passion rising in her breast.

"And a pretty husband he is! Didn't he come all the way from New York to see you, and then order me up in the middle of the night to light up the blue bedroom for him, and yours, his by rights, as cosy and comfortable as possible?"

Her voice grew loud and indignant as she ended, while a flush dyed Clare's fair face.

"Do not be so severe, Esther. Mr. Trevlyn was very tired, and wished a bath before he went to sleep. You should not judge him so harshly."

Esther laughed scornfully.

"And why wasn't his wife's bedroom good enough, eh? Don't tell me, Mrs. Trevlyn, that that man cares for you; don't tell me not to judge him, when every servant in the house gossips about you two the live-long day."

"No, Esther! The girls do not mention his name, do they?"

A proud, injured look was on her face as she raised it, tearful and flushed.

"And why don't they? They've every cause to, I am sure."

Clare arose from her chair, and walked slowly to and fro, her eyes blinded by the hot tears that welled from her sad heart. Suddenly she paused before Esther.

"To think that the time has come when Frederic and I are a byword among our servants! To think that he loves me so little as to conduct himself in such a manner, that people point at us and repeat that 'Frederic Trevlyn does not live with his wife!' Oh, Esther, it is hard to bear all this, silently and without demur! What have I ever done to merit all this agony and shame?"

She clasped her beautiful hands in an ecstasy of grief, and bowed her proud head on them.

"Sure enough, what have you done? I'll soon tell you. You've worshiped that man until you've concluded he is a god among men. You've slaved, and slaved for him, until he has grown weary of you, and now, while your love continues the same, his has waned, and in another vicinity he seeks new faces, new charms, to divert his mind."

Esther Waring spoke sharply, bitterly. When she had done, Clare raised her drooping head.

"Yes, God knows I love him, and God knows I am true to him."

Her passionate avowal made no impression on the indignant woman.

"But he insists you are disgraced and dishonored, and advises you to remain here, in seclusion and retirement, to meditate on past offenses and future punishment."

She looked triumphantly at Clare, who sat, pale and sad, like a broken lily.

"True," she responded, wearily; "true, Frederic does not believe me when I tell him I love him, and have never breathed a disloyal breath; but what must I do to convince him otherwise?"

"Do?" asked Esther, sharply, ironically. "Why, prove yourself his abject slave by immolating yourself in his gilded cage, and humbly receiving him when he condescends to come, as a dog does its master whom he fears."

"Cease, Esther. This is wrong, heartless. I am heart-sick and spirit-sad. To you I come for advice, for comfort; for, besides you, I have none else. My husband hates me, my mother is in heaven, my baby an angel! Oh, Esther, Esther, I am very lonely! Forget I am the rich Mrs. Trevlyn; call me little Clare again, as you did when I was little! Oh, Esther, my heart is so sick!"

Scalding tears dropped from her brilliant eyes, and the woman's lip trembled at sight of her woeful, pitiful face.

"God help you, my baby Clare, for you have a heavy burden to bear on those slight shoulders."

She wound her arms about Mrs. Trevlyn's neck, and kissed her forehead.

"Esther," whispered Clare, "can't I convince Fred how innocent I am? Tell me how to win his love again! He *must* love me; he *shall* love me, for I am his wife."

"Mrs. Trevlyn, come with me a moment," and Esther took her unresisting hand, and led her to the mirror.

"See, there is a beautiful woman, who can, who shall win her husband to his rightful love."

Gradually Clare's eyes grew soft, and her mouth rippled in a sweet, rare smile. Her perfect form was displayed to its best advantage by the close-fitting, graceful robe she wore; and her beauty was heightened by the severe simplicity of her dress. The starry eyes were floating with their tearful splendor, and from their dark depths looked out a tender, proud light.

"Yes, Esther, I *am* beautiful, am I not?"

"Every one calls you so, and that must be true which all indorse. Mrs. Trevlyn, this beauty is your weapon; you must bring your husband to your side again."

A smile played around Clare's exquisite mouth.

"Yes, I will take advantage of it. Life, wealth, pride—all, *all* will I gladly sacrifice if I may once more hear my husband say, '*My darling, my wife!*'"

CHAPTER XII.

BATTLING WITH SHADOWS.

SEVERAL days had elapsed since the day Frederic Trevlyn returned from Philadelphia, and, as usual,

after his trips there, he shut himself closely in the Archery, receiving his meals at the hands of his valet, at the half-opened door of his private room. He had not seen any one since his return, and his face wore that stormy, anguished expression of one passing through deepest waters.

The afternoon sunlight peeped through the shutters of the sanctum, where, pale and trembling, he sat, fighting another fierce battle with himself. The gray velvet curtains hid him from view, but a listener in the adjoining room might have heard the moans that burst from his hard-compressed lips.

"It is madness, yes, infinitely worse than madness! And yet, in my own strength, I am nothing. I can not—oh, I can not fight much longer against this mighty power that is dragging me down, soul and body, to ruin, desolation and remorse! And yet I court the sweet temptation; I delight to revel in the forbidden joy. Weak, powerless wretch I am, and still, what can I do? How shall I shut the last ray of light, dazzling to eternal blindness though it be, from my weary eyes?"

He covered his face in his trembling hands, and remained silent, until the sound of approaching horses' hoofs aroused him.

He glanced carelessly up; the least diversion was acceptable that would change the morbid train of thought into which he had fallen.

On the road, just beyond the rustic fence, two riders were approaching. One was Maude Elverton, smiling and fascinating as she looked earnestly at the gloomy house, searching for a salutation from him, little recking he was watching her from behind the closed blinds with throbbing heart and flashing eye.

Beside her rode George Casselmaine, proud, handsome, as he always was, and he, too, following the direction of Maude's glance.

They dashed on out of sight, and Frederic Trevlyn breathed freer again.

"Thank Heaven, she does not know my secret! No, my beautiful, bewildering Maude, you little dream of the mad, wicked love I feel for you. And, although I have almost betrayed myself, I thank Heaven the fatal truth remains unspoken in my own burning soul."

He rose again, and tossing his hair from his forehead, he paced the floor in his agitation.

"It will be happiness, unalloyed bliss for the time, to listen to her voice, to hang upon her smile, to gaze into the azure depths of her pure, innocent eyes; but, oh! when the end of it all comes, as it must do, the remorse, the bitter, bitter wailings of remorse!"

His eyes wandered to the road again.

"This will never do for me! I am wasting my best days in sorrowing for what I can not help; grieving for what can not be changed. I must engage my mind some way or other, or I shall go crazy."

And truly, his haggard face and flashing wild eyes reiterated his assertion.

With sudden determination, he jerked the crimson tassel by the door.

"Tell Mrs. Holcombe to come to my room a moment. I have an order for her."

The servant's exit was followed by the appearance of the portly housekeeper.

"Mrs. Holcombe, you will be exceedingly surprised, I think, when you hear that I intend remodeling the Archery, and partly refurnishing the western suite, on the second floor. Please set all the girls to work, have every room opened and aired, and made perfectly clean."

A tranquil expression had gradually crept over his weary countenance.

Mrs. Holcombe glanced toward the heavy gray velvet curtains that swept from ceiling to floor at the further end of the room.

"Not open every room, sir? Not enter that?"

She pointed to the sanctum.

"Heavens, no. I thank you Mrs. Holcombe, for reminding me. I will attend to these two apartments myself; you may see to the others as soon as possible."

He bowed, and Mrs. Holcombe, with a kindly beam of her mother-eyes—for she loved and pitied her employer, young enough to be her son—turned to depart.

Trevlyn called her again.

"One moment, Mrs. Holcombe; make preparations for a dinner-party on Tuesday next—a dozen couples. And be so good as to send William to me."

He walked to the window and closed the shutters tightly, fastening them with the heavy iron bars that he could barely lift. Then he lowered the upper sash, and raised the under one, leaving half the window open. With the two other windows he did the same, and in the total darkness groped his way to the gas-jet, and lighted it.

This he turned far down, so that a faint twilight pervaded the apartment. For a moment he bowed his head against the marble mantle, and in his anguish unheeded words fell from his lips.

"I am building the awful barrier between me and hope, joy and love; but, I thank God, the same gulf that separates me from life and light, unites me to duty and right-doing. Maude, Maude, my heart's beloved, to-day I am endeavoring to forget you! I am endeavoring to remember another, whose name and title deserves better treatment from me than I bestow, but whose actions have widely, hopelessly divided us."

He turned wearily away from the mantle, and lifted the gray velvet curtain.

"For the last time, for the last time," he murmured.

He stepped through, and the heavy folds closed after him.

It was only a moment ere he returned.

"I have left a faint light burning, which shall

never die until I do! I have looked on my treasure for the last time as the lonely master of the deserted mansion. The next time I enter my sacred retreat, I shall be known as Frederic Trevlyn, the gay, generous, hospitable host of the Archery."

He left the outer room, and after locking it, went to the open door in the hall.

"I am waiting," said William, as he appeared.

"I want you to ride to the residences of those whose names are on this list, and carry some notes."

He handed the man a list.

"While you are saddling your horse and arranging your route, I will sign the cards of invitation. In twenty minutes I will be ready."

The time had barely elapsed when Frederic appeared at the door, the envelopes in hand, while William led his horse to the carriage-block.

"Begin with the Villa, and end at the Grange," he said, as William rode off.

"It is of no consequence, but I feel as if every act I did that gave no preference to her was a safeguard," he whispered, with a bitter smile; then, as his murmured words recalled her too forcibly for silence, he repeated her name:

"Maude, poor child!"

He entered the house again, and again rung for Mrs. Holcombe.

"I am a great deal of trouble, I know," he began, pleasantly; "but will you take me through the rooms, and show me what you regard the most convenient suite, and the most elegant guest-chambers?"

"Bless you, Mr. Frederic, I shall be proud and happy to accompany you. But I must confess, it does seem strange for a gentleman not to know enough of his own house to go through it alone."

"I am a strange man, Mrs. Holcombe, as you truly say. Besides my bedroom and the ground floor, I have not entered a room in the Archery for two years."

His face clouded again.

"Do not let your mind run on your troubles, sir, so much. Pardon my boldness," she added, noting his stern features.

"Pardon me, my good friend, for neglecting you for so many months. As you say, my griefs oppress me constantly, and under their burden I almost faint at times."

They paused before a massive oaken door, in whose lock Mrs. Holcombe fitted a large brass key.

"This is the best guest-chamber, Mr. Frederic, and one in which the President might feel proud to sleep. To my notion there isn't its equal in America."

With a pardonable satisfaction, she pushed open the door, and glanced proudly around. It was a splendid apartment, the prevailing color pale pink. Carpet, curtains, and wall were all tinted in the same delicate shade, while, scattered in picturesque confusion, were every imaginable convenience and luxury.

Frederic gazed carelessly at it all.

"Yes, it looks very well."

"Very well!" repeated the housekeeper, in indignation. "It is elegant, splendid, magnificent!"

Trevlyn smiled at her enthusiasm.

"You needn't laugh, Mr. Frederic, for I am not the only woman who has gone in ecstasies over it." He turned quickly toward her, a flush rising on his face.

"What woman has been here?" he asked.

"If I did wrong, you must pardon me; but she was so pretty, and so lady-like, and begged me to show her the house; and I could not refuse, especially when she said she knew you, and she guessed you would not object."

The blush deepened; then his face paled.

"Of course you didn't let Miss El—the lady enter every room?"

"Bless you, no, sir. The finest and best only, of course."

"Who was it, do you know?" he asked, a feeling of exquisite joy filling him at the thought that Maude had seen his house; begged to see it; admired it. Of course, Mrs. Holcombe referred to her, for who else pretty and lady-like in all the country but Maude Elverton?

"She left her card with me, but made me promise I would not let you see it. It was a short name, like Kate or Belle; neither of those, though."

"Yes," he said, softly, "she means 'Maude.' Was it an uncommon name, Mrs. Holcombe?—an odd name?"

He almost feared the answer, lest, after all, it were not the one.

"The queerest I ever heard; I never heard it before or since."

He felt satisfied now—and if he only could get possession of the precious card, so that he might kiss the name he loved so fondly, he would find it a panacea in his moments of gloom and darkness.

"Mrs. Holcombe," he began, gently and persuasively, "I feel greatly flattered that any young lady should have been pleased with the taste I have displayed in my furniture. But could I know her name, I would like to present her my compliments."

He smiled at Mrs. Holcombe.

"But I have forgotten the name, Mr. Frederic, indeed I have, or I would tell you, seeing you would assure her how welcome she was."

"Most certainly I should, and invite her to repeat her tour of investigation. If I had her name—or the card," he suggested, hesitatingly.

Mrs. Holcombe's face brightened visibly.

"Sure enough, there is the card safe in my trunk, if I haven't lost it. I'll get it for you. You'll promise to be friends with her?"

His heart beat violently.

"Friends with Maude? Oh, if it were only that!" She returned soon, and Frederic saw a tiny slip

between her fingers as she triumphantly carried it along.

His eager hands almost snatched the priceless treasure. Maude's sweet name, traced by her own dear fingers. He coveted it more than untold gold. This should never leave him, and in the glimmering light of the silent, curtained room below, he would read it—Maude's own hand-writing. Mrs. Holcombe handed it to him. His nervous fingers took it tremblingly, and his love-lit eyes caught the sweet name. A pale, ashen hue crept over his face as he took the coveted glance, and, without a word, he handed it back, and strode fiercely down the stairs.

The innocent card lay in Mrs. Holcombe's open palm, while her wondering eyes followed her master's retreating form.

The name was short, sweet and sad.

The name was "CLARE."

CHAPTER XIII.

A SERPENT'S TONGUE.

GEORGE CASSELMARINE had returned from Rose Cottage in a strangely excitable condition, and to his infinite relief, found, as he surmised, that Mrs. Elverton and Maude were out driving. Notwithstanding which, as he entered the darkened parlor, for a cool siesta on the sofa, a little scream from an invisible occupant startled him.

"Oh, Mr. Casselmaine, I hadn't the slightest idea you were in the house! Isn't it provoking that Maude stays so long?"

George threw open the shutters to discover his companion.

"Miss Joyce—pardon me; my eyes were unaccustomed to the twilight of the room, and I did not recognize your voice."

He bowed respectfully, and Miss Joyce laughed merrily—at what, he was at a loss to know.

"Here is a seat," and she drew her skirts to make room beside her.

"Thank you," he said, seating himself, with as good grace as possible, and secretly wishing it were Ida.

"You look remarkably well, Mr. Casselmaine, considering your recent indisposition. It was too bad in Fred Trevlyn, I think, to leave you at that forlorn, out-of-the-way cottage, with an infirm old man and a fat colored woman to wait on you."

"I received most excellent care, Miss Joyce, though it came from neither of the two you mention."

He spoke distantly, coldly, but Helen Joyce would not admit that to herself even. She had a task to accomplish, a Herculean task, too, and she was resolved that no rebuffs should intimidate her. She had determined to win George Casselmaine, if not by fair means, then assuredly by unfair ones.

He little dreamed of the siege she was laying to his heart; he little dreamed of anything in connection with Helen Joyce, except that she was a good-looking woman—Helen Joyce was twenty-five—disagreeable and tiresome.

"Yes," she continued, "you look as if some awkward creature had nursed you—pardon me, Mr. Casselmaine. I do not refer to your awkward appearance, but that of the nurse."

Again she displayed her white, even teeth, and again Casselmaine wondered what she found so amusing. He did not know that she considered her teeth her greatest charm.

"I dare say I am a boorish-looking fellow, Miss Joyce, in your critical eyes, but I always am that, at the best of times."

"Oh, no, you are just the opposite of that, I'm sure."

She blushed, and then looked out the window.

"I wonder when Maude will be home? Do you know where she went?"

"I do not know either. Probably not before tea."

It wanted yet an hour to the supper-time, and he thought to discourage her from waiting.

"Oh, then, I may as well lay off my hat, for I must see her before I return."

She deliberately unfasted her kids, and laid them on the mirror-stand; and Casselmaine resolved the hour should be a solitary one so far as he was concerned.

After she removed her hat and shawl, she re-seated herself on the sofa.

"I suppose Maude has gone with Mr. Trevlyn, riding? They seem quite attached to each other," she remarked carelessly, yet watching the effect of her words.

"I can appreciate Mr. Trevlyn's discriminating taste in selecting Miss Elverton for a friend; she is a charming girl."

Helen bit her lips in vexation: her arrow had fallen harmlessly at his feet.

"Indeed she is," she continued, enthusiastically. "Maude is a sweet creature, and we are the best friends in the world. I know all her secrets, and she all mine."

"You could not have a better confidante. I know Maude never betrays what is confided to her."

Again the cold gleam in his eyes warned her he was not falling into the net she was spreading.

"I mentioned Mr. Trevlyn's name in conjunction with Maude's, because I know she thinks a great deal of him; a great deal, indeed. I should not be surprised if they were betrothed."

A sudden glow of anger he could not avoid mantled his face.

"Miss Joyce, if you think to wrench from me any demonstrations of jealousy on Miss Elverton's account, you are proceeding in the most impossible way. If Miss Elverton considers you what you very evidently regard yourself—her confidante, she is grossly deceived, and you have basely betrayed her."

Without a parting word he walked proudly out from the room, leaving her to quench her rage as best she could.

And indeed it would be difficult to define the varied tumult of emotion that swept over her.

Rage, mortification, wounded pride and love—for with all her might she loved George Casselmaine—struggled and conflicted.

Her face grew dark and severe; her light, keen eyes darted fiery rays of malicious vexation, as she paced to and fro, awaiting the return of Maude, in whose ear she was so anxious to pour her poisonous words.

She had not long to wait, for in a few minutes after her companion's abrupt departure, the sound of the carriage-wheels on the gravel-walk announced the return of the ladies.

Mrs. Elverton alighted, and proceeded at once to her dressing-room.

Maude, seeing Helen's face between the curtains, entered the parlor.

"I hope I have not kept you waiting very long; have I?" Maude asked, as she removed her elegant camel's-hair shawl, glancing a moment at Helen as she spoke.

"Only a half-hour, *chere*."

"Which must have passed lonesomely here all by yourself. I am sorry we were not home sooner."

"Mr. Casselmaine has favored me with his gentlemanly company part of the time."

Helen spoke sourly and crossly.

"Why, what is the trouble?" inquired Maude quickly, noting the rising in Helen's tones, and on her face. She knew her betrothed had, in some manner, offended her guest.

"Nothing mentionable; pray do not allow it to annoy you. I don't fancy Mr. Casselmaine very much, that's all."

Maude laughed merrily at Helen's grim visage.

"Nonsense, *amie*, George is too thoroughly a gentleman to cause any lady to dislike him. You may have misconstrued a word he said, for I am positive he never speaks indecorously to any one."

"If he were to tell you you were a base betrayer of secrets, and accuse you of loving another person better than your betrothed husband, wouldn't you take offense at it?"

She looked Maude full in the face as she uttered the treason.

Maude's cheeks flushed an angry scarlet, and her eyes suffused with tears.

"Helen, George Casselmaine did not say that?" Her voice quivered as she spoke.

"He did. He said he thought you liked Fred Trevlyn better than you did him, and that it was dishonorable in you—"

"Helen, Helen, stop. Did he dare call me—Maude Elverton, *dishonorable*?"

Her flashing eyes searched scrutinizingly the impassive pale face, so haughty and self-assured, before her. The keen gray eyes did not falter when they met the fierce glance, nor the cheeks redden as the lips deliberately uttered the falsehood.

Helen Joyce looked boldly at Maude.

"George Casselmaine not only accused you of being false to him, but he declared the disloyalty was mutual, as the pretty girl at Rose Cottage had won his heart."

Maude's proud head drooped to the arm of the sofa, and the hot, scalding tears fell copiously over her round white arm. No complaint did she utter, no other sign that she was insulted, outraged in her womanly faithfulness to her future husband—and grandly true she had compelled herself to be, as the reader remembers—

Helen watched her tears with ill-concealed delight.

"Let me part them; let me part him and the miserable cottage-girl, and I will reap my reward, even if a half-score years pass before I win him. I will marry George Casselmaine, come what may, and he shall fourfold repay me the bitter debt he incurred this day."

"Helen," and Maude raised her face again, her eyes tearless, her countenance devoid of all traces of her previous emotion, "I am very much indebted to you for your kindness, and I think I appreciate your friendly interest in accepting my honor as your own, for I know your anger arose entirely from hearing my name defamed."

"Indeed it did. I am not the person to sit quietly by, and hear any one speak harshly about my friends."

Maude laid her head affectionately on Helen's shoulders.

"Dear Helen, I am so thankful you are such a true, fearless woman; so noble and high-principled in everything you do or say. George could not have selected a more honorable *confidante* for his opinion."

"And the *confidante* has 'basely betrayed,' you see," returned Helen, playfully. "When I told Mr. Casselmaine I should certainly inform you of our interview, he accused me of being a betrayer of confidence, and what lowered him still more in my estimation, and will, I am sure, in yours, threatened to deny, *in toto*, every thing he said, in case you brought him before you; and not that alone, but he said he could turn the tables against me, so it would appear I had maligned you, and he indignantly defended you."

"Heartless!" ejaculated Maude, as Helen ceased, and stroked her hair lovingly. "Do not feel embarrassed, dear Helen, for I know, positively, you would never speak ill of me. And it is very hard to think George should, either."

Helen did not reply, nor did Maude see the almost fiendish smile on her haughty lips.

"Maude, will I be forgiven if I say something I fear I should not?"

"Say any thing you choose; you cannot offend me."

Above Maude's bowed head Helen's eyes gleamed delightedly, as she thought: "But let me ascertain

if Frederic Trevlyn and Maude do reciprocate each other's love, and I am on the very path I am seeking. Then baffle me who may!"

Her voice, as she began, was hesitating and half fearful.

"I must have another promise that I may whisper my unimportant opinion—or, rather, suspicion—and not offend or distress you in the least. And that, if I am wrong, you will love me none the less."

"You have the promise sacredly given. Now speak."

"Then," said Helen, lowering her tones until they were low and liquid, "then, *chere*, I think Maude does love Fred Trevlyn."

The words were few, but a vivid blush mantled Maude's face as she raised her head.

"Why do you think so?"

"Because I know, from good authority, that the handsome master of the Archery loves George Casselmaine's betrothed to idolatry; and Maude Elverton can not, for the life of her, avoid returning that love."

She kissed her tenderly.

"Helen, promise never to tell a living soul that I do love him as I never shall love again."

A proud light gleamed in her eyes as she nobly confessed her affection.

"Rest assured of that, *chere*. And now, knowing you love each other, may I congratulate you that the barrier is removed? For, of course, your twofold reason for releasing Mr. Casselmaine will direct you to break the engagement as early as possible."

"I must acquaint mamma and papa with this affair, and see George myself. Of course, I shall dismiss him, for, after what he has confided to you, I would not wish to become his wife, even if—"

"You really loved him," supplied Helen, as Maude hesitated. "Remember, I caution you against what he may say of me; for, in his wrath that I said I should faithfully repeat every word to you, he unwittingly said what he did. So be prepared, dear Maude, to hear me spoken of very harshly, perhaps scandalously. But I trust you know me too well to credit a word."

"Indeed, no one can influence me against you; you can always believe that I am a true friend, even as I know you are."

Helen pressed her hand affectionately.

"I shall have to go home again, for I expect Mr. Winchester to tea; and father is very particular about our punctuality."

She drew her shawl gracefully around her, and put the dainty little hat on her head; then, when she had fastened the kids, she kissed Maude, and went away.

CHAPTER XIV.

A CONTRETEMPS.

SEVERAL days had elapsed, each passing as the other to the inmates of Rose Cottage—each marked by the urgent advice of Mr. Tressel for Ida to accept Andrew Joyce—each occupied in part, at least, by a visit from the gray-haired lover, who begged and implored her sweet consent. But Ida remained indignantly firm. She stoutly persisted in refusing to converse on the disagreeable subject, and the two old gentlemen had at last laid their heads together to concoct some plan whereby their darling scheme should be accomplished.

The days had passed, and since his first and only call, Ida had watched in vain for George Casselmaine's appearance. From her white-curtained window—doubly dear that he had looked from it—she watched the shady country road, wondering why he did not come; wishing he were there, if but for a moment, and then chiding herself with suffering her thoughts to dwell so continually on him.

What did George Casselmaine care for her? He had said or done nothing more than any other gentleman would when he admired a lady.

Then she remembered, with a thrill of exquisite pleasure, the earnest gaze of his fine, dark eyes; the pressure of her hand when he bade her adieu, and the solicited entreaty that they might be friends.

From him her thoughts reverted to her persistent suitor, whose voice even then reached her ear, and her whole soul went out in a rebellion against the wickedness of the desired alliance.

Buried in thought, she took no note of the passing moments, until a sharp knock at their front door awoke her from her reverie. Hetty had already ushered the caller in, and then came to call her.

"It is the gentleman, honey—the handsome gentleman who was hurt."

A wild throbbing of her glad heart told how welcome the news was to her, and, though her fingers trembled, she hastily made a few changes in her toilet, and went down-stairs. Near the part-opened door she paused to still the tumultuous beating of her heart, and collect her senses before she entered; then, firmly, yet enthusiastically, she opened the door. Casselmaine arose to meet her, and taking both hands, led her to the sofa, and then seated himself beside her.

"It has been so long since I saw you, that I ventured to call again before strict etiquette admits. But I think I am welcome?"

"Very welcome. I wish you had come sooner."

He smiled, and took her little hand, holding it caressingly in his own.

"Then I wish it heartily, too. I find my best enjoyment in your society, Ida, and many are the hours I would pass at Rose Cottage were I master of my own actions. As it is, my host and family claim, and very properly, a large portion of my time."

"Which every other gentleman envies you for, especially on Maude Elverton's account."

"They well may, for she deserves all the praise

bestowed upon her. Yet—and I suppose I should not dare speak it—I do not think our marriage will be a happy one."

He spoke absently, and his eyes were far out of the window, on the beautiful expanse of meadow-land that stretched before them.

Ida shivered and started, and her cheek paled. Then to her beautiful eyes the tear drops rushed.

He did not see her agitation, but he felt the quivering of her fingers, and he turned to her.

"It should be happy, I'm sure. Maude is all you could desire, and you—"

Her voice faltered, but pride came to her rescue. And though his eager, loving eyes were fixed on her changeable features, she managed to finish her remark.

"—You are quite a favorite with her."

He smiled again, but bitterly this time, as he listened.

"I am glad you think so highly of Miss Elverton's choice. I presume you knew an engagement existed?"

In his own soul he felt the cruelty of the question, and yet he desired to ascertain if she cared for him.

Ida heard his question, and more calmly than she afterward thought possible.

"I did not, Mr. Casselmaine. How should I?"

Her gaze was directed from him, and her fingers restlessly pulled a twig of clematis to pieces.

"I thought you were acquainted with Miss Elverton; she would have made it no secret."

Ida's cheek flushed as she replied:

"I am very slightly acquainted with Miss Maude, but you know she is an heiress, and I a penniless country girl. Confidences between such antipodes would be impossible."

She spoke coldly and haughtily.

"Yet I offer you my confidence, Ida, while I am an heir of a larger estate than the Grange."

"I account for it on the ground of our mutual friendship."

George read earnestly her sweet, flushed face, and it seemed he loved her then better than life itself.

"I think I said my union with Maude would not be a happy one; and, as my little *confidante*, I tell you why. I fear my heart is given to another, a less dowered maiden, but one I dearly love."

For a moment Ida's breath came in quick spasms, and a sensation of keenest rapture thrilled over her; she raised her eyes timidly, but he was not looking in her own with the tender, loving look she expected. He was dreamily gazing on the emerald sea without.

Little did she know the superhuman effort he was making to keep her name from his lips; little did she know that he resigned her hand from his grasp because he durst not retain it. Soul of honor that George Casselmaine ever was, he would go no further than drop these hints, so vague and uncertain, until a proper time should come, which in his soul he felt *would* come, which he resolved *should* come. And Ida, when she met no answering beam from his far-away eyes, felt a strange, numbing coldness creep over her. A heavy weight settled over her, which would not be shaken off.

She made no reply, and he continued:

"I shall depend on you, friend Ida, when I see this beautiful lady-love, for your interest in my behalf. May I depend on it?"

This time their eyes met. His not as Ida had dreamed a lover's ought to be, while he was trying to throw all the carelessness possible in their dark depths, so false a mirror of the heart beneath. She forced a smile to her lips, and a light to her aching eyes. And Casselmaine, in the light of his love, thought she might have divined the hidden meaning of his language. Yet he made no sign.

"Certainly, Mr. Casselmaine. Whatever I can do to serve my friends I gladly undertake."

"Then my errand is accomplished, and I shall return to the Grange. We will see each other in a week at furthest, and then I will beg your intercession for me with my sweetheart."

He took her hand, and raised it respectfully to his lips.

At that moment black Hetty opened the door with a flourish, and ushered in two ladies.

Maude Elverton and Miss Joyce!

They bowed coldly to Ida, and very haughtily to George, who addressed Maude immediately.

"Miss Elverton, this meeting is most opportune. We shall have a pleasant walk home, for I half dreaded the solitary walk."

He advanced to her, graceful and unembarrassed, while Helen, blushing and confidential, sat by Ida, whose face was flushed to the hue of the carnation.

"Thank you: I think the sudden interruption of so charming a *passage d'amour* very inopportune."

Maude's words were bitterly sarcastic.

"Miss Elverton, as his hostess I am bound to defend my guest. Mr. Casselmaine is perfectly innocent of the charge you fling upon him."

"Of course; I beg you will not allow our unfortunate *entree* to annoy you."

Helen Joyce spoke in her scathing tones. Ida blushed, and Casselmaine replied:

"Maude, an explanation is due you, which I desire to make to you privately. Will you accompany me to the Grange? Miss Joyce will remain with Miss Tressel and make the necessary apologies."

His face was flushed from excitement.

Maude haughtily accepted the invitation, and together they made their adieux to Ida, who was left alone with Helen Joyce.

"It is altogether accidental that Maude and I should surprise George here. We were out for a promenade, and stopped for a rest."

It struck Ida uncomfortably that Helen Joyce should speak of Mr. Casselmaine as "George," and she told her so.

"Bless us, child, doesn't every girl call her lover

by his Christian name? At least George wishes me to call him so, and he usually addresses me as 'Helen' or 'Nellie.'"

Her viper-like eyes were fastened on Ida's pale face, eager to read the thought that flitted across it. Ida laughed, but Helen knew it was a fearfully forced laugh.

"Why, you surprise me beyond measure. I thought Mr. Casselmaine was engaged to Maude Elverton?"

"So he was," responded Helen, lightly, folding plait after plait in Ida's white apron; "so he is considered still. But he and Maude mutually annulled the betrothal, and I think Maude will marry Mr. Trevlyn. And George was only too glad to be released, for he confessed to having loved me—me, Ida, isn't it strange?—ever since he saw me."

A maidenly blush of modesty spread over the face of the traitress.

"He seemed very ill at ease before Maude, did he not? I think it was she who corrected him for venturing to touch his lips to my hand."

"Yes, it was Maude," returned Helen. "She thinks he should have been more loyal to me. But I haven't the least objection in the world. I am content to know that I shall be his wife, and then—oh! the different times we will see at the Villa! I intend to change the order of things in a style that will astonish my old father."

The dutiful daughter nodded toward the porch where her father and Mr. Tressel sat.

"I saw him talking to your father when I came past. He comes every day, doesn't he? I heard him say he thought a great deal of Mr. Tressel."

Ida remained silent; a dreadful gloom filled her heart. She saw no ray of light in the future, no gleam of hope. Everything was shut away from her, and the one glorious dream of life and love had flown forever.

"I guess I had better walk on after them," remarked Helen. "I see Mr. Trevlyn coming down the road, and as he will walk by Maude, of course George will want me."

Carelessly she drew her sacque around her shapeless shoulders, and bade Ida adieu.

CHAPTER XV.

THE PROMISE.

ALONE in her own room, Ida walked the floor in silent, speechless agony. In the few hours that had elapsed since she had been almost stunned by the sudden revelation of George's betrothal to Helen Joyce, her sorrow had taken the form of taciturnity. Her cheeks had assumed a haggard paleness, and her eyes a supernatural brightness.

That night, after Andrew Joyce had departed, without seeing her, as usual, her father called her to come down-stairs. Obedient and sternly silent she entered his presence. He was kind and gentle, and took her in his arms, tenderly as if she had been a little child.

"Ida, my daughter, I heard all that Helen said. God pity you, God help you, my poor child, in your bitter grief."

He stroked her hair lovingly, and with fatherly caresses, so unusual now, in these latter days, when he had urged upon her the importance of the proposed marriage. Her tears, that had been sealed for the last four hours, fell in torrents at sound of his kind words, and she laid her weary head on his shoulder.

"Father, father, I loved him so—ay, I love him now!"

"But he has trifled with you, my child, you see, and the best you can do will be to tear his image from your heart, and cease to remember him."

"I cannot, I never can! You know not what you ask. His memory can never leave me, never be effaced. Oh, father, I wish I was dead."

Her form shook under the conflicting emotions that struggled in her breast.

"Not so, my Ida. This sudden, and to you painful event seems to me most auspicious and providential. You know to what I refer?"

She started suddenly away from him and disengaged her hand from his.

"Do not desecrate this hour, I beg, by such an allusion. Let me bury my old love before you introduce the new lover."

Old Mr. Tressel wiped the tears from his eyes.

"Be that as you will, my child. Mourn over your faithless—"

"He was not faithless," she interrupted, eagerly. "He never loved me—it is I, only I, who loved—loved unbidden, unasked, uncared for."

Her exquisite mournfulness, and the quivering of the palid lips were pitiful to behold, and her father turned his head aside, to avoid the sight of her grief.

Like a pale, broken lily she moved about the little cottage, followed by her father's watchful eyes, and faithful Hetty's glistening ones. After she had mechanically prepared the simple supper, and Hetty had left them alone, she drew her footstool to her father's side.

They were sitting on the porch, in the September moonlight, cool and delicious. Quiet and fragrance from the dew-laden flowers filled the atmosphere, and the charm stole into Ida's soul with a strange, subduing influence. She laid her head on his knee, and took his wrinkled hand in hers.

"Father, we will talk this affair over; we will settle it finally, to-night. First, I will candidly tell you, I am utterly opposed to the marriage, and regard it at this moment as I did a fortnight ago, when Andrew Joyce first mentioned it." She paused a moment, and then, finding her father evidently expecting her to fully define her ground, continued: "I confess, father, I loved George Casselmaine," her lips quivered when she spoke the loved name, "and the knowledge of that love rendered my gray-

haired suitor more repulsive than he would ordinarily have seemed, by comparing him with another—so young, graceful and handsome. But now my love-dream is over, I will hear your oft-repeated reasons why I should marry Andrew Joyce. I am calm, my mind free from floating dreams of what might possibly happen."

"I told you, child, that your suitor would sell our roof over our heads the day you forever cast him off. He does not regard himself finally rejected, and has unbounded confidence in your compassion for him, no less than a proud consciousness that any woman would be proud to be installed mistress of the magnificent Villa. By the way, Ida," he interpolated, eagerly, "you would have a splendid chance of revenging yourself on that upstart Helen. You would ride over her head, for Andrew swears every wish of yours shall be sacred, every request promptly granted."

"I would be Helen's stepmother, and George's stepmother-in-law," she remarked, quietly, with no suspicion of a smile on her lips.

"Just so," returned Mr. Tressel, delighted at her willingness to listen to this loved subject.

"Mr. Joyce is old, to be sure, but intelligent, yes, finely educated, wealthy and influential. His character is above reproach, his position enviable, his jewels, carriages, horses, plate, furniture and mansion the finest far and near."

"His form bent and decrepit, his eyes dim and sunken, his hair white, his knees tottering," added Ida, still calmly severe.

"You must not expect great personal accomplishments in a man as old as I, Ida; but remember a younger lover could not offer the princely wedding-gifts Andrew Joyce will give you."

"Father, look me in the face; straight in the eyes, and tell me if it is your heartfelt wish, your most cherished desire, to see me, young and fresh, married to that man?"

She raised her face to his—her clear, calm, truthful eyes to his.

He returned the look, as calmly, as truthfully.

"I speak from my heart, Ida, when I say, if I know my own thoughts, if I attend to my daughter's best interests, that there is no news on earth would please me better than to learn you had accepted Andrew Joyce for your husband."

Ida uttered a little cry as the words fell on her unwilling ears.

"He will be kind to you, Ida, kind and dutiful; kind and loving."

She shivered at the last words, and raised her hands as if to beat something off.

"Don't, father, don't! I can't bear to think of it."

A solemn silence intervened; then she lifted her tearful face.

"Is this inevitable, my father? Must I bow my head in obedience to this act from which all my nature shrinks in horror? Oh, father, tell me I have your consent to send him away when he comes again, finally and forever!"

Mr. Tressel's lips compressed tightly, and his eyes assumed their cold, steely expression.

"There is no hope, my daughter. I have sworn you shall marry him, and I know you dare not violate my sacred vow."

Ida replied not a word. Her hands fell gradually from her father's knee, and her graceful head bowed to her breast. The bitter stroke had fallen on her, and left her in hopeless desolation, stricken and disconsolate. Mr. Tressel eagerly followed up his last words.

"Ida, you see George Casselmaine will marry another. You know we are poverty-stricken if you dare refuse. You know all that awaits us both if you consent. Will you do it? May I tell Andrew Joyce my daughter accepts him?"

For a moment she stood, stony and still, her head thrown defiantly back, her eye gazing wildly down the moonlit road. Then her answer came, sounding like a voice from the grave:

"Tell Andrew Joyce I will see him to-morrow afternoon. If after that interview he still desires to claim me, I will accept him."

She shivered, and then, staggering and moaning in her wretched grief, repaired to her sleepless vigils.

CHAPTER XVI.

A WOMAN'S RESOLVE.

CLARE TREVLIN sat in her splendid boudoir, and beside her, her faithful companion and friend, Esther.

"Yes, my friend, I saw his home, the very place where he lives year after year, a lonely, solitary man, and I, his wife, so far away from him. I saw the bed he sleeps in; I kissed the pillow and laid my cheek on it. I saw his toilet-case with the delicate perfumes he loves so well, his shaving apparatus—oh, Esther, was it wrong because I wept over them all?" She bowed her beautiful head on her fair hands, while the stern woman opposite smiled bitterly.

"And he curses you with every breath he draws."

"Esther, no. Frederic Trevlyn does not curse his wife, dares not! He knows I love him, and he may ridicule my weakness, but curse me—me, Effie's mother, never!"

Her sweet face was full of wifely pride and womanly dignity.

"But, Esther, although I am neglected, deserted, despised, remember the cause. Remember I was foolishly angry, and would not give the explanation I should have given, which he, as my husband, could have demanded. I was wrong there, Esther."

The plain, homely mouth parted sternly again.

"Wrong to kiss that other, that handsome, noble gentleman? wrong to refuse the insolent demand

Frederic Trevlyn made when he saw you put your arms around his neck, and lay your head on his shoulder? No, a hundred times, no!"

"Your advice arises from prejudiced opinion, Esther. You liked my husband in the first months of our married life, I am sure."

"Yes, I admit that, for then he used you as a wife deserves to be used. Then he came from his business to his home like other men, and you were happy—until that night."

Esther's brow contracted angrily at a memory that recurred to her.

"Yes, I was happy until that night," repeated Clare, eagerly. "And since then I've never known a moment of happiness. Oh, Esther, you little dream of the anguish of mind I've endured."

"Don't I know the sleepless nights, the restless days? don't I remember the pleadings of yours—the impertinent refusals of his? I think I know very well what misery must be yours."

"Frederic is of a jealous disposition, Esther, and what I innocently intended as a joke has separated us forever, I fear."

Her plaintive tones fell on no pitying ear, for Esther Waring felt no emotion but indignation for the wrongs of her beautiful mistress and friend.

"But, Esther, you know I am resolved to win him back again, if I am possibly capable of it. I hardly know how to proceed, unless you, Esther, can propose a plan."

"Mrs. Trevlyn, you had better remain just as you are, than attempt what must ultimately end in mortification and regret."

Clare shook her head decidedly.

"No; I am determined to change the course of my life, and that immediately. I think to throw off the cloak of reserve that covers us, and open our mansion to guests, give entertainments, attend parties, frequent the opera and theater, will be the most natural as well as successful step toward the accomplishment of my project."

"And if the liege refuses the money wherewith to conduct such an establishment, then what?"

Esther spoke ironically, and Clare threw her a severe, reproving glance.

"You forget I am Trevlyn's wife, Esther, and will not allow further harsh remarks about him. Besides, you remember my small fortune will maintain the most extravagant style for two years at least."

She arose proudly, and opened the exquisite little case on her dressing bureau.

"These diamonds alone, Esther, will bring fifty thousand dollars."

She wound them about her snowy neck and wrists.

"Splendid!" she murmured, reviewing the reflection in her mirror.

"I am beautiful, accomplished, wealthy, but what matters it all when my husband does not love me—my own husband, who refuses to hear my vindication?"

Slowly she removed the glittering gems and replaced them in the ruby velvet *etui*, and then sunk wearily on the damask lounge.

"Yes, Esther," she said, after a long silence, "we will open the house, and issue cards for my reception. If the people think I am a widow, let them think so; better that than be a deserted wife."

Bitterly she added the last few words.

"I will order the dressmaker to have a suitable dress, and you may attend to the supper-table. See that every thing is the finest and best, and let the table be gotten up regardless of expense."

Esther folded up the ruffled apron she was making, and silent and stern descended to superintend the arrangements.

The cards were printed, and by a strange coincidence she emerged from her retirement the same day, the same hour, that her husband received his guests at the Archery.

Her elegant parlors were filled with the elite of Philadelphia; her music was the sweetest heard at any previous reception; her supper the most delicious, her entire entertainment the most satisfactory.

Renowned guests were there, whom other invitations from other parties had failed to bring, and it seemed as if the goddess Queen herself had laid her best tribute at Clare Trevlyn's feet that night.

Flushed and handsome, yet withal dignified and charming, she moved a veritable queen among her guests, admired by all, envied by many, a mystery to not a few.

Her sudden appearance created a *furor*, which added to a fresh-blooming beauty, lent new attractions to the lovely lady.

Evidently her letters of introduction had been first-class, for the very best citizens of Philadelphia attended her levee.

Thus her *debut* was a glorious success, and even Esther's hard face relaxed in a grim smile as she saw the adulation offered to her darling.

Of all the guests was one gentleman whose personal appearance was strikingly handsome, who was at once the admiration of every lady in the room. He was a stranger to Mrs. Trevlyn, and a stranger to her guests, with but one exception.

Senator Rowe had brought him, as the guest of his own family. As Senator Rowe's friend he was cordially received.

The party had arrived late, and the hostess had not yet received their compliments. For a moment Clare was at liberty, and the handsome old gentleman, accompanied by his wife and their guest, approached her.

The greetings over, the senator presented his companion.

"Mrs. Trevlyn, my dear madam, allow me to introduce my young friend and nephew, Mr. Cas-

selmaine. He is just returned from Judge Elverton's old Grange, near New York, and I could not permit him to tarry at my house this evening while we were away. I brought him along. He is not a well man, I see by his face, and hope this visit will do him no harm." The kindly old man rattled away as if no formality were necessary.

"I am happy to meet him—very happy. His late residence entitles him to more than ordinary consideration, as Judge Elverton's place is very near the home of a dear relative of mine."

Mr. Casselmaine bowed in return.

"There are several residences contiguous to the Grange, which are occupied by friends of mine. I did not entirely understand your name, dear madam, or I could instantly divine to which you refer."

The carmine deepened on her cheek, and she lowered her eyes.

"Mrs. Trevlyn, my boy, Mrs. Clare Trevlyn," returned Mr. Rowe, in explanation.

He raised his head, with a quick, eager motion.

"You mean Frederic Trevlyn, of the Archery?"

"Yes," she whispered, hoarsely, "I mean him."

The sounding music called her away, and George Casselmaine followed her graceful figure, lost in a maze of bewilderment.

Mrs. Trevlyn? Who was she?

CHAPTER XVII.

JANUARY AND JUNE.

In order to fully and satisfactorily explain the appearance of Maude Elverton's betrothed at Mrs. Trevlyn's reception on the day when Frederic Trevlyn also held his first levee, we will retrace our steps a few days, to the period where we left Ida Tressel after her interview with her inexorable parent.

Punctual to the hour of his daily coming, Andrew Joyce arrived at Rose Cottage.

Mr. Tressel met him at the door; they exchanged a few words which delighted them both very much, for a brightness lighted their countenances as they entered the room, and Mr. Tressel bade Hetty summon Ida. Pale as death, but calm and collected, she entered their presence, and gravely bowed to Mr. Joyce, then sat quietly beside her father.

Mr. Tressel broke the embarrassing silence.

"I told Mr. Joyce, my child, the message you intrusted to me."

She nodded gently in reply.

"And Mr. Joyce, thinks it entirely unnecessary to repeat the extreme satisfaction, the heartfelt joy your decision has given him," remarked Mr. Joyce himself. "My beautiful Ida, I am the happiest man living, for I have won the lovely Ida Tressel for my wife, the peerless crown of my declining years."

She bowed her head, as if in acceptance of his graceful compliment.

"But, Mr. Joyce, I think when you hear what I have to say, what I sent for you to say, you will retract your offer, and leave me free."

Mr. Joyce rubbed his soft, white hands gleefully together, and smiled cheerfully.

"Do not fear you will offend me, my dear. Say on, say on."

She raised her face to his, burning with blushes, the eyes filled with tears.

"I told you once before I loved another; I tell you the same to-day. You take a heart that in none of its recesses has a niche for you. I make this humiliating avowal to you, of all men, because I believe you recall your suit, do you not? You give me my liberty, do you not?"

Her beautiful, pleading face and clasped hands enamored him but the more.

"I admire, I deeply appreciate your confidential avowal, for it is a tribute to my sympathy for you. In return may your sweet confidence give me the right to ask you if your love is reciprocated?"

A vivid, painful hue spread over her neck and face, even to her fair hands, while her lips refused to frame the reply.

At last, when she could, she spoke, low and pitifully.

"No, no; he does not even know I care for him."

Her burning tears fell unheeded on her snow-white dress.

"Then, my dear child, I see no reason why I should release you. Indeed, my great love for you will soon make up for any thing you have suffered on his account—and you know you had better be my darling than his slave."

Her heart almost stood still while he spoke.

"Then you will not be merciful, and refuse to accept me?"

She spoke hoarsely, and a new light, a hidden fierce fire shone in her eyes.

"No, I cannot—no, I will not relinquish my treasure."

She caught his arm, and clutched it tightly between her quivering fingers—so tightly that he winced with pain.

"Andrew Joyce, if I yield, it is because I am forced to yield! forced by a bleeding heart which dare not struggle any longer! forced by circumstances I blush to mention—which would otherwise drive me and my gray-haired father homeless into the world. But, Andrew Joyce, in yielding, I say—*woe to you!* I have plead with my father, I have entreated you, I have condescended to lay my poor torn heart to your view, and you refuse the balm of healing. I do not like you, I cannot even tolerate you—I pray I may not *hate* you."

The words came hissing from between her teeth, and her form towered defiantly grand.

"If you hated me to death, I would not give you up!"

The fire in his aged eyes, the strange resolution in

his aged voice, thrilled her with unutterable horror, and a cry rung from her lips.

"Be it as you say; but, as I say, believe, your triumph will bring you no satisfaction, no glory. In becoming your wife—no, in becoming Mrs. Joyce—I become what I never was before, a hunted woman, who has sold her happiness for a roof to sleep under; who has wrecked her whole life's happiness for her gray-haired father's sake. Andrew Joyce, I hold my word inviolate; but you will regret this hour—the hour when you ever saw Ida Tressel!"

Lifting her proud head in conscious dignity, she swept from the room, casting a glance of withering contempt on the admiring old man by her father's side. They sat for an hour arranging the preliminaries to the wedding, which the entranced lover was desirous of consummating immediately. Mr. Tressel knew of no reason to prevent, and Mr. Joyce said the Villa would be ready for the bride at an hour's notice.

This was communicated to Ida, who listened with quiet scorn.

"Being but a tool in your hands, I shall not presume to differ from you."

So the ceremony, to be quietly and simply conducted, was arranged for the next day.

There were no strangers but the pastor of the little country church; Hetty was the witness, and her father gave her away.

The moment the farce was over—so did it seem to her—without waiting for congratulations or her father's blessing, she turned to Mr. Joyce:

"Sir, I have preparations to make this evening before I am able to take up my residence at my future home, which will prevent my giving you or my father my company. It will take Hetty and I till the morning sunlight to arrange my wardrobe; to-morrow, then, you may, if you see fit, call for me to accompany you to the Villa. Until then, *va!*"

She bowed sternly, and ascended to her room, whither Hetty followed.

The bridegroom smiled compassionately.

"Let her have her own way. To-morrow I'll come for her."

He repaired to his home alone, to return on the following day for his bride.

All that night she and her faithful colored woman passed in arranging her clothing and little knick-nacks preparatory to her final departure from the home of her childhood.

The hours passed all too quickly, and with a sinking heart she saw the faint flushes of the sunrise in the pearl-gray east.

The breakfast was silently dispatched, and her trunks strapped and locked on the sunny little porch where she had passed so many happy hours.

All things were in readiness, and with her sad face turned away from the direction to the Villa, she waited her husband's coming.

Not long did she wait, for, before the noonday the elegant barouche of Andrew Joyce drove grandly up to their low, vine-wreathed door, and the pompous footman, in his blue and silver-tasseled livery, sprung to assist the old man down.

He was dressed in his finest suit of black broadcloth; his spotless cuffs and collar, his massive gold watch-chain, his shining beaver-hat met her gaze, as Ida looked forth from the half-opened door.

He came slowly to the room where she sat, and extended his hand to salute her, but she drew back, and then went in advance to the door.

Her father and Hetty followed the couple to the carriage.

"This is my wife—Mrs. Joyce, boys. Arnold, assist your lady in."

The footman and coachman raised their hats in polite amazement, and Arnold officiously handed her in, then held the door open to await his master.

"We will drive over often, Tressel; and whenever the carriage comes vacant you will understand you must return in it."

He shook hands with his near relative, and Tressel found the deed of their home in his palm.

He smiled to his daughter, who carelessly nodded; to old Hetty she gave a parting glance of grateful remembrance; then her husband was helped into the carriage, and they drove off.

Mr. Joyce was talkative and pleasant; Ida stern and reticent. From his conversation she learned the marriage was still a profound secret from every one, and her lip curled with scornful contempt when she remembered the insult her daughter-in-law, two years her senior, had offered her, and in this hour of blighted joys, blasted hopes, she felt to revenge her for her share of her own unhappiness.

"I am not Ida Tressel, forgiving and happy. I am Ida Joyce, stern and crushed."

They drove up the wide carriage-path, and stopped before the open doors of the Villa.

At the gorgeous curtains that shaded the plate-glass windows, the pure marble floor of the vestibule, the solid silver knobs and sill, she vouchsafed not a glance. She did not realize she was entering her own home, elegant and costly, but she only remembered it was her gilded prison.

At the door a portly woman met them, who looked with astonishment at the simply-clad girl beside her master.

"This is the new mistress of the Villa, Mrs. Bond. My young bride, my wife."

The housekeeper courtesied deeply, and then congratulated Ida.

"Show her to the suite on the south side, and have Jeannie sent up to wait on her. Mrs. Bond, have a grand dinner prepared, and tell my children I wish to see them at one precisely in my library. Do not breathe a word of what you know."

She received her orders, and departed to obey them.

In a moment a tap on the door announced the arrival of the maid Mr. Joyce had sent for. She was a pleasant-looking girl, about twenty-two or three, and in her blue eyes Ida found a world of sympathy.

"This will be your new lady, my good Jeannie, and your exclusive business is to serve her faithfully. You know I told you yesterday I should bring my wife home soon, so you are ready to receive her. Show Mrs. Joyce the dresses that were sent last night, and see that you faithfully attend to all she directs."

Jeannie bowed in return, and Ida acknowledged his kind thoughtfulness by a frigid bend of her queenly head.

She started to follow Jeannie, but her husband laid his hand on her sleeve.

"Ida, my dear, my wife, I have done every thing I could think of to make your home agreeable to you. I am old, child, old and foolish, and you are young, and fresh and blooming. But, as God hears me, my little frightened wife—as God hears me, I swear to regard your every wish; I swear to do all that lays within my power to make you happy and contented. My children shall respect you, my servants shall obey you. My house, my purse, my heart are yours; do with them as you see fit. All I ask of you is, to bear with the old man."

He raised her hand to his lips, and then let it fall gently.

The tears sprung to Ida's eyes as she followed Jeannie up the wide, broad stairs, whose thick velvet carpet returned no echo of their footfall.

Past room after room, whose doors, half ajar, disclosed the costly wealth of their varied decorations, she went, until, on the front of the second floor Jeannie paused and fitted the key.

The polished silver knob yielded to her hand, and mistress and servant entered the spacious and magnificent apartment. It was every inch a bridal-chamber, and from it opened another smaller room, fitted for her private boudoir; and beyond this still another, expressly for herself, all adorned in the most luxurious manner.

Jeannie followed Ida's admiring glance, and smiled with pardonable pride.

"It is *magnifique*, madame, and monsieur is very fortunate in securing so *petite* and charming a wife to occupy it. Will madame be so good as to examine the robes, monsieur ordered yesterday? They are *charmant* robes; will madame view them?"

The pleasant French girl unlocked the rosewood wardrobe, and laid the elegant dresses upon the bed for Ida to see.

Almost confused by their number, and dazzled by their beauty, she turned them over.

"These are handsome, all, but I prefer the dress I brought. It is a wine-colored silk, and will answer very well for an informal dinner."

From her trunk, which the footman carried up, she took her only silk, new a few weeks before.

She put it on, and the set of rich old lace her mother had worn before her in their better days. A plain, yet exquisitely beautiful set of turquoise jewelry completed her toilette, and when Jeannie surveyed her she enthusiastically pronounced her "*parfaite! charmante!*"

CHAPTER XVIII.

MUTUAL FRIENDS.

THE walk from Rose Cottage to the Grange was not the most delightful lovers' promenade ever enjoyed.

The moment Maude and George had passed beyond the gate that led from Mr. Tressel's little flower-garden to the country road, she turned unhesitatingly toward him.

"George, take your ring; I return you your troth; we are free!"

He saw the outstretched hand holding the heavy circlet he had placed on the slender finger a few weeks before, but he glanced in sheer amazement from it to her face.

"Maude, what does it mean? Why do you return me my ring, my liberty?"

His eyes eagerly searched her lofty face, and she met his look.

"You ask me *why*, George? Do you not know?"

"I protest I do not. Have I, in word or deed?"—he almost added "*thought*"—"done anything to call for this sudden termination of our engagement?"

"Have you?"

She only turned his question on himself.

Despite his efforts, a scarlet hue crept to his cheek, for he remembered Ida.

"There is no possible use for us to pretend ignorance longer, George, concerning this love affair. You do not care for me, and you have said I do not care for you. Be that as it may, the only alternative is to annul our betrothal."

"You say, *be that as it may*, Maude, meaning your regard for another. Tell me, do you desire to break our engagement? Tell me truly."

Her eyes fell before his earnest gaze, and the delicate color faded and then glowed on her cheeks again. He took her hand tenderly.

"We are friends, the best of friends, Maude; therefore let us, in a friendly manner, discuss this subject fully. You offer me my ring, thus annulling our vows. I ask you in all sincerity, in all kindness, *why?*"

His tones were low and soothing, and as Maude listened, she wondered if, after all, Helen had been mistaken.

"George, I will answer you as fully as I am able. I think—nay, I know—you love another better than you love me. That alone is a sufficient inducement to urge me to break the engagement. Besides, you

should be preserved from marrying the woman you in your soul believe is cherishing some one that is not yourself. These are my reasons."

While she was speaking a new light had slowly illumined his dark eyes; as she finished, an angry flame burned in them.

"Maude Elverton, let your accusation be your accuser. You say I believe you cherish another where I should be regarded. Maude, I never said it—but, Maude, I ask—do you not?"

Her truthful eyes fell beneath his piercing glance. "Confess to me, first, your affection for Ida Tressel."

He started at mention of her name.

"Ida Tressel! Maude, what do you know of her?"

"That she is pretty and lady-like; a girl that any man might be proud to woo and win."

She followed her prompt words by her rare smile. "George Casselmaine, Ida Tressel is worthy of you. Were she the heiress of broad lands and a grand estate, she would be sought by the proudest of our citizens. As it is, he who has the courage to take her from comparative poverty and obscurity, and place her on his level of influence, will never regret the day he does it."

George still toyed with her white fingers as they walked along.

"She loves you, too; it is written on every line of her face. I give you your full liberty, friend George. Now, take this ring and place it on Ida's finger."

Again she handed it to him, but he refused it.

"You are generous, womanly, Maude, and I admire you as I never did before. In return, may I question you as closely?"

She made no reply, but he inferred from her demeanor that Helen Joyce had spoken truly when she said Maude thought a great deal of Frederic Trevlyn.

"Let me ask, Maude, in the same charitable spirit that has characterized our interview, if you do not love, a thousand-fold more than me, the handsome owner of the marble building yonder?"

He pointed to the gleaming observatory of the Archery, so like a white cloud among the green tree-tops.

Maude's heart gave a great bound, then seemed stilled to suffocation. She felt the decisive moment had come, and with her own hand she would now remove the barrier existing between Frederic Trevlyn and herself.

Not for worlds would she have broken her engagement with Casselmaine had she never heard from Helen Joyce the words the reader remembers; and now that both were mutually offering their best affections at other shrines, she rejoiced inwardly at the knowledge.

Yet the maidenly blush of modesty sprung to her fair white neck and face as the question reminded her that she must confess a love never yet asked of her, if she would answer him as candidly as she knew he expected. But a happy light gleamed in her lovely eyes, for, although unspoken, she knew Fred Trevlyn loved her.

"George," she returned, at length, after a long pause, while the autumn wind sighed melodiously through the branches over them, "George, I will acknowledge it to you. I open my whole heart to you. You will sacredly guard my precious secret, will you not? George, I do love, with all my heart, all my might, Frederic Trevlyn."

He held her hand and grasped it warmly.

"My dear Maude, your sweet confidence demands my heartfelt answer—that, though I resign one of the noblest women living, I claim for my bride her I love best and fondest."

He kissed her hand respectfully, and then their embarrassment was over.

"It is a strange affair, this mutual retreating from each other. But both of us will be happier, Maude, far happier. You with your chosen one, I with my darling Ida. Yet we are friends, true friends, and will be forever."

She assured him on the subject, as she, for the last time, offered him the ring.

"I take it, a pledge of friendship from you; a token of love for another."

The sound of approaching footsteps disturbed them. Maude turned, and a sudden bloom on her face told George who was approaching them.

Frederic Trevlyn rapidly neared them, and just as he reached them, Helen Joyce came up by a shorter route, and the quartette entered the Grange gates.

CHAPTER XIX.

TEMPTED.

NEVER had Maude Elverton been more bewitchingly beautiful than she appeared that afternoon, and as her stern, silent lover gazed after her graceful form, his heart grew cold and faint when he remembered her charms were not for him.

The excitement of her recent interview with George Casselmaine had lent a happy light to her beautiful eyes, and heightened the rich bloom on her cheek, while every pulsation of her heart throbbed to the tune of freedom to love whom she pleased.

In her blissfulness, she felt assured that now, when Frederic Trevlyn knew George had released her, he would fly to her side, and speak the words she was so anxious to hear.

His determination had solemnly been to hold no more communication with her, for he fully realized his inability to meet the fierce temptation that came upon him in her presence; and his mood grew sterner and sterner every passing moment, while Maude became more and more bewilderingly charming.

Casselmaine could not but detect Trevlyn's agitation, and in the fullness of his heart, no less than a fervent desire to serve Maude to the utmost of his power, he resolved to seek an interview with him.

A sudden summons from Mrs. Elverton to the ladies favored him in his purpose, and, without any preliminary skirmish, he at once addressed Trevlyn.

Frederic had watched Maude narrowly when she left the room, and his gaze was still on the vacant spot she had occupied, when Casselmaine spoke to him:

"Mr. Trevlyn, will you pardon my seeming boldness if I ask you if Miss Elverton is not very dear to you?"

A haughty bend of his head and a fierce gleam in his eyes was the answer Frederic vouchsafed.

"Do not be affronted, I beg, for, believe me, my sole object is your happiness and her own."

"My happiness and hers, Mr. Casselmaine? What can we two possibly have in common?"

"That I can not undertake to say. I merely, as a true friend and well-wisher, and not as Miss Elverton's lover, mention to you that I shall not stand in your way of winning her."

A bright smile, preceded by a struggle in his inmost soul, lighted Frederic's pale face, and he extended his hand enthusiastically.

"Thank you, thank you. You have then released her, because—because *what*?" he asked, suddenly.

"Because both our welfares demand it. Because Maude Elverton does not love me—because she loves another, and because I love another."

"Sufficient reasons, I should say, for your actions. But you must be a strange man, to not love, worship her."

Casselmaine returned his glance with a smile.

"You are not grieved, Mr. Trevlyn, that such is the case?"

Trevlyn rose from his chair in desperation. Never before had the temptation come so overwhelmingly upon him to cast aside the fetters that cruelly chained him down.

He walked rapidly to and fro, torn by these violent emotions, in which the right was sure to come up, if not for a long while; if the wrong were indulged first, the right was sure to finally reign. Suddenly he caught George's hand.

"She is the star of my stormy existence, the idol of my lonely life. And yet I dare not, oh, my God, I dare not win her!"

On his forehead stood great drops of perspiration, as he wrung Casselmaine's hand, who returned the fierce pressure in sympathetic pity.

"I do not presume to refute your words, Mr. Trevlyn, but I certainly may be allowed to assure you that your success will be certain. I will not betray confidence, even to relieve your apprehensions, but I am positive you will never regret, if you woo and win Maude Elverton."

"I know she loves me—can not my loving eyes read her heart? Did not my soul predict these longing agonies long weeks ago, when first I knew her? Sir, I have sat by, and with scorching heart and freezing brain saw her lovely hand rest in yours, noted the bewildering intoxication of her smile, the glorious sunshine of her eyes. I have seen all this, and cursed myself that I was not the happy lover of this peerless woman."

His voice grew husky with the storm raging within, and he bowed his head on his clasped hands.

"You say yours has been a loveless, lightless life; then why, when this glorious ray of sunshine comes to gladden and cheer the gloom, do you refuse to accept it? Why grope deeper into the night-shades, when, at your bidding, the noonday sun will illumine your path?"

"Oh, do not tempt me! you know not what you say! Maude is not for me; she is too good, too pure, too holy for me."

Casselmaine heard the groan that issued from his pallid lips, but he turned coldly away.

"I will not intrude further. But if Maude Elverton's affections are crushed forever through your stubborn will or false pride, you will be the wretched cause."

Trevlyn raised his head to look after him, and a smile, icy and bitter, played on his handsome face.

"Stubborn will—false pride—oh, Heavens, if that were all!"

From the room adjoining came the musical melody of Maude's voice, as her merry laugh sounded through the open casement.

He listened greedily.

"Why should I, as he said, cast off the last chance of happiness left to me? Why should I suffer for another's sins?"

The wayward thoughts would rankle in his heart, and, we must confess, found an abundant entrance there. His better nature hovered hesitatingly over him, while into his soul crept the longing for the forbidden joys he craved.

"Yes," he said, and his eye gleamed wildly as he reviewed the scene before him. "I will be no fool to grope in this useless gloom, when Maude Elverton's hand will guide me."

He would woo her; he would kiss her as his eager heart said he would be kissed. He would pour his love-words in her ear, and listen to her murmuring avowal.

And then—?

Then he was not Frederic Trevlyn, noble, upright, honorable; he was a sinful man, deserted by his guardian spirit, led at will by his wicked human heart.

CHAPTER XX.

THE FLOOD TIDE.

THANKS to good Mrs. Holcombe's management, the splendid apartments of the Archery were in their best condition for the reception of the dozen guests who accepted Frederic Trevlyn's invitation.

The affair was an unparalleled one in the annals of his history among them. Since his sojourn here, two years before, he had never opened his house to

a guest, traveler or friend, and the only stranger who ever entered the marble walls had been, in the first year of his residence there, a beautiful woman of fairy-like appearance, who need not be the mystery to our reader which she was to the neighbors, for Clare Trevlyn, until Mrs. Holcombe's days, had frequently visited her husband's home.

It had been under an assumed name, and for brief periods, that Frederic Trevlyn allowed her to come. After a time he had grown to distrust her more and more, and all communication was stopped.

No one had invaded his privacy for many a long day, and now the families in the vicinity were rejoicing over his change of mind.

Carpenters had been at work during the fortnight previous, and upholsterers from the city had superintended several of the rooms, and now its stern, haughty owner walked carelessly to and fro in the long, marble-floored hall.

"I am thankful the Grange party promised to be present first," he repeated, his attention directed toward the road by which they would arrive. He had been in a state of feverish excitement ever since his interview the day but one before with George Casselmaine, and as the hour approached when he knew he would tell Maude his love, he became intolerably restless.

At four o'clock they came, the dignified doctor and his elegant wife; George Casselmaine and Maude.

Maude's dress was superlatively becoming; a simple white Marseilles, with a natural rosebud at the lace collar, and a second in the luxuriant masses of her hair.

She was bewilderingly gracious too, and her lover gazed rapturously upon her eloquent face.

"The Archery is a most delightful place, Mr. Trevlyn—just the ideal spot of mine, where one might forever pass his days in perfect, perpetual happiness."

Frederic looked wonderingly at her. Was it possible she had thus opened a chance for his avowal? He decided instantly as he looked at her admiring face as it viewed the beauteous objects that met them at every turn.

He essayed to speak, but his language failed him, and silently he walked on beside her. They were alone, entirely alone, in his rare garden, where flowers and perfumes mingled their beauty.

The air was soft and balmy; the sunshine shone goldenly blue, and hung in misty radiance over the landscape.

These lovely attributes of nature were not without their effect upon the two, as, arm-in-arm, they walked along the box-bordered path.

Abruptly, almost fiercely, Frederic Trevlyn loosed Maude's arm, and stepped before her.

"Maude Elverton, did you know I loved you?"

He had not uttered the words, ere he would have given worlds to have recalled them. Instantly he regretted the lawless passion that gave them birth, and could he have done so, would have annihilated them forever.

But Maude?

Those magic words thrilled her to her very soul. She drooped her beautiful eyes, and the rich color deepened on her glowing cheeks. Unconsciously her hand stole to meet his, and the desperate clasp of his own made her shiver with the pain he inflicted.

"Frederic, I do know—"

She laid her disengaged hand on his shoulder, and raised her love-lit eyes to his, so full of joyous truth.

What could he do? What should he do? She was like a siren, urging him to certain destruction. Never before had his temptation taken this form—the form of Maude Elverton herself, pleading her own cause. His position was particularly perilous; momentarily he regretted the words his lips had spoken, and as he regretted he loved the more. He desired now to resist the temptation, and yet seemed determined to court it.

Maude would be his; Maude loved him! Oh, the tormenting, exquisite agony of *that*: she loved him! No one could accuse him of sin—at least until he had put oceans between them: what, therefore, hindered this blissful cup of joy being pressed to his starved lips? A calm, yet thundering voice in his ears whispered that he was charterless, compassless. Why be driven about on this wild sea of passion, with no guide, no polar star? Why not listen to the soothing of conscience, and obey her dictates? Why—another monitor whispered—destroy Maude's eternal happiness, why blast Clare's last hope, why ruin his own soul—all for this?

"Only this?" he thought, "*only this*?" and his anguished heart, amid all its strugglings, knew that the road to final happiness did not lay thitherward.

"Maude, I—"

He was interrupted by George Casselmaine, who suddenly appeared before them.

"Forgive me, my friends, for hearing your conversation. Although I unavoidably was compelled to be a listener, I think you both know no one rejoices more over your mutual love than I. God bless you, keep you, and make you a comfort to each other!"

Before either Maude or Frederic could reply he was gone, and Maude smiled as she saw him take the road to Rose Cottage.

Other guests that moment arrived, and they were compelled to part.

"God help me!" he whispered, fervently, as he wrung her hand, and out from his aching heart went more pity for her, the gentle, loving, trusting girl, than sorrow for himself.

The greatest danger had passed. Maude left him to return to her mother, flushed and deliciously happy. He to receive his guests and maintain the honor of his character as host.

Good angels and bad angels had toiled for the supremacy, and, thanks to the Higher Power who ever hears the agonized prayer of the tempted—be that temptation great or small—truth, duty, honor and right had prevailed, and after his daily visit to the velvet-curtained recess, whither he repaired for a few stolen moments after his interview with Maude—a period spent on bended knee—he came forth strengthened, purified.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE REVELATION OF SORROW.

GEORGE CASSELMARINE had gone to Rose Cottage, gone on the first opportunity that presented, and intending to return before the dinner hour to the Archery—to see Ida Tressel. Gone to pour forth the love he knew she would so gladly hear, and his heart batted blissfully as he neared the vine-embowered cottage where she awaited him.

What did George Casselmaine care that she was poor and of humble parentage? Had he not enough of wealth and influence for both?

He would build them a splendid mansion wherever she wanted to live—and furnish it with all the luxuries and conveniences he could devise or she imagine. She loved bright, rich colors, he knew, and his heart beat almost audibly as he mentally planned the room they would occupy.

Their room! ah, the words lent a swiftness to his feet, and a lightness to his eyes.

Darling little Ida, with her graceful ways, her modest demeanor, her *piquante* loveliness, would ornament a king's palace, much more his unworthy home. And a very palace of love, at least, he resolved to make it, wherein discord should never come; where love and joy should reign, and he himself be her devoted husband-lover.

It seemed, as he walked along, as if he trod on air, so elastic were his spirits, and he almost feared that his anticipations were not to be realized; but he smiled away the foreboding as he pictured to himself the scene at the cottage. He knew that Ida's graceful form would come to the door to welcome him, and he could see the downcast happiness in her dark eyes; he imagined he heard the sweet melody of her voice, and the silvery laugh that so often floated from her carnation lips.

He lived over the scene he knew would be so true, so lifelike, when he took her little brown hand in his and told her *she* was bride of his heart—*she* the one for whom he asked her intercession; and then how beautifully her eyes would gaze upon him when he placed the engagement ring on her finger.

He reached the gate, at whose base the luxuriant grass was untrodden. It was very quiet, and he glanced up to the fringed white dimity curtains at the windows of her room, whither he had often caught her peeping. The curtains were falling before the glass, and down-stairs the shutters were closed.

Not a sound broke the deep stillness as he walked up the narrow path and rapped on the closed door.

No one answered his summons, and with a vague apprehension of horror that Ida was ill, he went by the well-trodden grass-grown walk to the back door.

On the porch sat Mr. Tressel, sleeping soundly, his red bandana handkerchief thrown over his face.

He trod softly, so as not to awaken him, and entered the neat little kitchen.

There was black Hetty, her work all done, her large, old-fashioned Bible spread on a clean white handkerchief, over her plain linsey dress.

Her spectacles were off, lying across the open page. Her eyes were bent on the floor, and her hands clasped meekly together. Her attitude plainly denoted extreme depression of spirits.

He spoke gently, that he might not startle her, but at the sound of his voice she arose to her feet, and courted respectfully.

"I would see your mistress, Hetty. Shall I find her in the sitting-room or parlor? Never mind. I'll go in myself."

He stepped over the threshold, not pausing to glance at her again, but at sound of her voice he turned toward her.

"Miss Idie ain't in, sir. Miss Idie's out, sir."

Her very comprehensive explanation brought a deep shade of disappointment to his brow.

"Out, Hetty? That is unfortunate. I wished particularly to see her. Will she be in soon? or stay, tell me which way she has gone, and I'll continue my walk and come back with her."

A spasm of pain crossed the old woman's face, and she turned her head away to hide the fast-dropping tears.

"She'll be gone all night, sir, I'm a-thinking. You had better come in and rest you a bit."

But he started for the door.

"You said she had gone—which way?"

A moan of pain issued from Hetty's lips, but she bravely hid her emotion.

"I promised I'd not tell him—and I won't," she murmured to herself, then added aloud: "She went to Mr. Joyce's."

He started immediately, with a kindly nod to the negress, who watched him with streaming eyes.

"Poor lamb! poor lamb! oh, Miss Idie—dear Miss Idie, how'll she ever stan' the sight of him!"

She resumed her seat, while George walked rapidly back to the Villa.

The distance was short, and in his restless eagerness to see her, was soon accomplished. The gateway was open, and he saw, in the carriage-yard, the barouche being drawn out, for the family use to Frederic Trevlyn's dinner-party.

The house wore an unusually festive look, for the rooms seemed all open and occupied. He experienced a peculiar sensation as he entered the open

vestibule—one he never forgot, and attributed it to the fact that the woman of all women most distasteful to him—Helen Joyce, lived there.

He dared not inquire for Ida, for he was not sure she was there, so he sent his card to Mr. Joyce, whom he had several times met.

In the lofty reception-room he waited for his host to receive him; for a brief time he sat there dreaming of Ida, wondering if she were there, when the door opened, and Mr. Joyce entered.

Usually dignified to coldness, he astonished George by grasping his hand with painful friendliness.

"So you've come to congratulate us all, have you, old fellow? I thank you, I thank you heartily."

George bowed in amazement, but seeing how mortifying his ignorance would render him, determined to feign perfect knowledge of the cause of congratulation, and mentally resolving to cut short his call as soon as he saw Ida—if she were indeed there, which he rather doubted.

Mr. Joyce rung the bell when he had finished speaking.

Jeannie answered the summons.

"Tell your lady I would be very much obliged to see her in the reception-room for a few minutes."

A feeling of provokedness prompted Casselmaine to refuse seeing Helen Joyce, the "lady" he knew of the Villa; but politeness bade him meet her, with at least a show of cordiality.

A light footstep sounded on the stairs, and Mr. Joyce hastened to meet her. He escorted her through the door, and triumphantly announced her:

"My wife—my bride, Mr. Casselmaine."

George turned in astonishment.

He looked at the lady, and his glance turned to stone. Slowly he raised his arms, in a mute appeal of the keenest anguish to the white-robed figure; then swaying, reeling like a ship driven by adverse winds, he fell; and as he touched her hand in falling, all the concentration of that moment of unspeakable agony was uttered in the words that fell from his trembling lips:

"My God!"

CHAPTER XXII.

IDA'S WEDDING-DAY.

THAT had been a trying day for Andrew Joyce's timid wife, when she had met, so unexpectedly, the daughters of her husband, who were older than herself.

In her matchless loveliness and haughty consciousness of superior position, she had gone down to the dining-saloon, on her husband's arm, after the family had assembled.

Helen, the eldest, Julia, the second, and Irene, the child-daughter, were awaiting their father's entrance.

As usual, Helen occupied the seat at the head of the table—a position very gratifying to her vanity.

"Mrs. Bond has committed a most ridiculous mistake in supposing our family consisted of five instead of four. Why is that plate there?" she asked, impatiently of the housekeeper, who entered the room for a parting survey of the table.

"That?" she asked, confusedly, for she remembered Mr. Joyce's instructions to keep the matter a secret. "Oh, I think your father expects company to-day."

"What! when we are all going to the Archery?" Helen asked, incredulously.

"Leastwise, my orders were to lay an extra plate, Miss Helen," returned Mrs. Bond, shortly, as she left the room.

That moment the door opened, and Mr. Joyce and Ida entered.

Helen sprang in astonishment to her feet, while the other girls, who never had seen Ida before, stared wonderingly.

"Miss Tressel—you surprise me! To dinner? I am certain no invitations have been issued."

Ida's cheek flushed hotly at this insolent speech, but her calm gaze returned Helen's contemptuous one.

"Miss Helen, have the goodness to forbear your jokes in my presence. My position enforces not only respect, but *obedience*." Her freezingly polite words aroused Helen's ire still further.

"What impertinence! Do you presume to insult Andrew Joyce's daughter in her own father's house? I am mistress here!"

Her light eyes fairly scintillated with her rage, and her voice was choked with passion. She pointed to the door, while Ida smiled in conscious superiority.

"Would you insult Andrew Joyce's *wife*, in her own husband's house? I AM MISTRESS HERE!"

Grandly rung out her melodious voice. Helen gasped for breath.

"*Wife!*" she screamed, in a fearful storm of unbridled rage; "*you* my father's wife! *you*, a common, low—"

"Silence!" said Mr. Joyce, bringing his fist down on the table till the dishes rung again. "This is my wife, whom you will respect and obey in every particular. Helen, remove your seat near to your sister's. Ida, my dear, this is your proper place."

He bowed to Ida, who loftily occupied the chair Helen was thus forced to vacate. Her eyes flashing, her bosom heaving, she confronted her father.

"If you think to disgrace our family by this *mesalliance*, you need not think I shall endure the shame, the insult! I am Andrew Joyce's daughter, not Ida Tressel's slave."

She cast a menacing glance at Ida, but her father raised his hand sternly.

"I command silence. Helen, if you can not behave yourself, leave the room. Julia, follow her. Irene, my little daughter, I am glad you are a good girl; your sisters have greatly mortified me."

Proudly Helen and her sister walked from Ida's presence, and she and her husband, with the ten-year-old Irene, ate their dinner in peace.

It was scarcely over, when Casselmaine called. Jeannie summoned her, and, in total ignorance of the caller's identity, she went coldly down the stairs.

To her horror, grief and surprise, she recognized George Casselmaine!

It was a fearfully-cruel blow to them both, and Ida thought he was dying when she saw him lying so still and cold at her feet.

Darting from her husband's side, she knelt beside him, chafing his cold hands, and her hot tears falling on his pale, grief-stricken countenance.

Not a word did she utter, yet her heart was in a tumult of inquiry as to what had caused his extreme emotion. Surely, the simple fact of her marriage, sudden though it had been, could not affect him thus; and a sudden, piercing thought—what if, *after all*, he had loved her, and Helen had deceived her?"

She grew dizzy and faint at the awful possibility, but rallied, determined not to allow such thoughts to gain ascendancy.

Calling Mrs. Bond, they soon succeeded in restoring the senseless man to consciousness.

Mr. Joyce had been called away, and Mrs. Bond had retired when her services were no longer required.

Ida knelt on the carpet beside the sofa, eagerly watching every motion of his lips. At length he opened his large dark eyes, and Ida sprang to her feet in confusion.

A smile of ineffable sweetness lighted his countenance.

"Oh, Ida, my darling! Thank God, it was only a dream!"

He extended his arms, as though he would fold her to his heart.

Quickly, eagerly she looked up, the expression on her face, as it lightened at his words and gesture, speaking volumes of joy, love, and even hope. But it passed as quickly as it came, and left her paler, whiter than before.

"Don't look so coldly—so coldly, Ida. You are not ill, are you?"

He raised himself up on one elbow, and scanned her face earnestly.

A mighty struggle was going on in Ida's breast. What did this mean, unless he loved her? But if he did love, what mattered it *now*?

"Speak, speak, Ida, for heaven's sake, and tell me what the matter is?"

She strove to do as he bade, but her tongue seemed paralyzed. Another effort, and her pale lips moved.

"I am not Ida Tressel. You—"

"God! not Ida Tressel? Who, then, are you?"

He sprang to his feet in wildest excitement.

"Either I am going mad, or you are deceiving me? Which is it?"

"I am Andrew Joyce's wife, married yesterday—" A fearful cry burst from his pallid lips, and he fell on his knees before her.

"Ida, Ida, my own! Unsay those dreadful words. Oh, darling, my precious darling, I am on my way to win you for my own! Kiss me, Ida, and promise to be my wife!"

He wound his arms around her neck, and drew her head to his breast.

She struggled to free herself, but he repaid her efforts by showers of kisses on her blushing cheeks.

"I implore you to listen. I repeat, emphatically, I am no longer Ida Tressel, but the wife of the host of this house. Your betrothed is Andrew Joyce's daughter, Helen—not his wife, Ida."

She forced her voice to speak coldly, and instantly he released her.

"Can it be—can it be? *You*—you, that old man's wife? I betrothed to Helen Joyce? You know better, and are very cruel! Oh, Ida! this from you!"

She uttered a cry, like a wounded bird, and caught his hands in hers.

"George Casselmaine, tell me truly; were you not plighted to Helen Joyce?"

"As God hears me, never! I released Maude Elverton, and hastened to claim you—my first, my only love—with Maude's blessing."

Gradually his voice grew sharp from the strain of sorrow, and when he ceased speaking, he bent his face, in desolate mournfulness, on Ida's hands.

"Oh, George, George! forgive me, and pity me! Don't for mercy's sake, don't!" she sobbed, piteously, as he kissed her cold hand.

"I loved you, Ida Tressel, and it was the sweetest dream of my life; I shall never know another. The world before me is very dark, and the only ray of light to cheer me is that you loved me—you were not false."

He stopped abruptly, for the gathering tears choked his utterance.

She laid her hand on his bowed head in gentle tenderness.

"My lot is the hardest to bear, and God alone can give me grace to endure it. But, George, give me your blessing before you go, and then I can better bear my heavy burden. I shall die if you don't, George, I shall die."

A sick, faint sensation of deepest despair filled him as she ceased speaking, and he did not restrain the tears that would fall on her hand.

"Rather let us pray our Father to help us both, my lost, my Ida. He alone knows my anguish, and your agony. Oh, my darling—let me call you so to-day for the last time—my lost darling, the blow is so unexpected, so fearful. This morning, in the supreme joy of my heart, I went forth to claim you, my own; this afternoon I weep over you—the bride

of another! Ida, Ida, it is hard—it is more than I can bear!"

Her heart ached for him, while, in the memory of what might have been, it bled for herself.

"We will say farewell now, George; we must. Let us strive to forgive the terrible wrong that has forever separated us. Let us part—friends."

She extended her hands, in a silent appeal for his farewell grasp. He took them and pressed them to his breast.

"I bid you farewell, my only love, my lost darling. Be true to your chosen husband, and may God reward him and his as they reward you for this dreadful sacrifice. God bless you, my precious one, and keep you, and guard you, and direct you—and me!"

He pressed her in his arms, closely to his agonized heart, and imprinted a last, long kiss on her quivering lips.

A hand laid gently on his arm arrested him. It was Andrew Joyce, his eyes dim with tears.

"Young man, I heard all; I know all, and I honor you! I am at best a frail old bark, and will soon put up for repairs forever; and then she will be yours. You deserve her; and were I not so wickedly selfish, I'd give her up this minute. As it is, she will have to bear with me a little while—only a little while, and then all this elegance and wealth will be hers, and she'll make you a royal bride!"

Old Mr. Joyce dashed off the teardrops, and George wrung his hand in pitiful thankfulness, and, without a word, strode straight to the Grange. He packed a valise, and the next train bore him to his uncle, Senator Rowe.

Five hours after his arrival in Philadelphia he stood in Mr. Trevlyn's parlor.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A WIFE BUT NOT A WIFE.

AT Frederic Trevlyn's dinner-party one guest was absent—George Casselmaine, whose reasons were hastily written as he left the Grange, and delivered to the host by a special messenger.

An unexpected guest was present, being the wife of Andrew Joyce.

The surprise of the guests knew no bounds when they were acquainted with the fact of the sudden and secret marriage of the gray-haired owner of the Villa; and comments passed freely on her youth, beauty and grace. Her poverty and obscurity were now things of the past, hence utterly forgotten; and while as Ida Tressel she might have been ignored by the aristocratic ladies of the vicinity, as Mrs. Joyce she was flattered. Ida filled her position with exquisite dignity, and none of all the assembled guests—excepting Maude and Frederic, and it might be Helen Joyce—dreamed of the heartrending interview that had transpired an hour before her arrival at the Archery. Calm, dignified, pleasant and intelligent, she was a general favorite, and her gray-haired husband loved her better than ever.

The guests returned rather early, and among the first to retire was the family from the Grange. Maude had been quite happy all that delicious September afternoon, and she looked forward impatiently to the time when her lover would complete the interview so rudely interrupted.

She had watched him closely all that afternoon, but he had studiously avoided her, in look and deed. She admired this high-souled delicacy, and looked proudly on and worshiped silently.

When the hour came for their parting salutations, he followed her to the carriage.

"May I see you to-morrow, at twelve o'clock? I wish to have your exclusive company for awhile."

She did not see the pained expression of his noble face, or the happy blushes would not so quickly have crimsoned her cheek, or the joyful light burned in her eyes.

"Come at twelve, and I will certainly give you the favor you desire."

She threw him a kiss, and he returned a polite bow, and the footman closed the door between them.

Maude returned to her home to dream of poor George Casselmaine, of her handsome lover, of faithless Ida Tressel, and thanking God her happiness was so sure.

Poor child, she little knew what a day would bring forth!

Trevlyn re-entered the house to bid adieu to the remaining guests, and then, when quiet once more reigned over the Archery, withdrew to his room to pass his daily hour of penance and prayer.

The wedding-party were the last to depart. Mr. Joyce and Ida occupied the barouche, while the daughters were escorted by their attendants. The ride was passed in utter silence, and even when the footman sprang to assist Ida to alight, not a word was spoken.

Ida entered the house, and ascended to her room, sick and weary.

Jeannie had arranged every thing for the night, her bridal night, and had, by Ida's express orders, retired to the servants' floor above.

Ida entered, and locked the door after her, and alone for the first time since the hour of suspense and anguish that had left its ineffaceable hand on her heart, she sunk on her knees in an agony of bitterest grief, that, restrained so many hours, now burst forth in a fearful torrent.

A low rap at her door startled her, and, with a perceptible shiver, she opened it.

"Ida, still in your visiting dress?"

Her husband smiled pleasantly, and closed the door after him; then he threw himself on the blue velvet lounge near the door.

"Still up and in full dress, sir. I desired to see you a few moments, and this is the most befitting costume I possess."

He gazed wonderingly at her, as she stood proudly before him.

"My beautiful wife, my peerless Ida; let me bid you twice welcome to the Villa, your home, your empire!"

He extended his hand, but she made no response.

"I thank you for the kindness you have shown me to-day, sir, and I will ever gratefully remember it. But to-night it is necessary that we come to a full understanding of our position to each other. Shall I continue?"

He gestured for her to proceed, and she began again in her low, musical tones:

"I told you, Mr. Joyce, if you persisted in marrying me, after I had repeatedly refused you, and plainly told you that my affections were bestowed upon another—her lips trembled, but she forced back the emotion—that the union could bring no triumph, no victory to you. I repeat the same now; you have taken me; you have shown me to be your wife before the world. I am Mrs. Joyce to the world, I am their father's wife to your children. I am the rightful mistress of the house, and as such I will be obeyed. I ask no favors, I receive none—excepting one, which I ask not only, but demand in the name of common humanity."

"Speak, my dearest one, and your one solitary wish is granted; I promise on my word."

A sudden brightness swept over her face, irradiating every feature for a moment, then vanishing again.

"It is that you leave me, leave my room, and consider this apartment mine *exclusively*."

She spoke defiantly, proudly almost.

Mr. Joyce arose to his feet in wonderment.

"But, my wife, you know such a request is an unprecedented one—a—"

"Mr. Joyce," she interrupted, "unprecedented or not, I demand this privilege. You have two reasons for granting it. First your pledged word; second, that I solemnly declare, that, although I am your wife in the eyes of the world, once over the threshold of this room, I am Ida Tressel!"

For a moment they looked fully and unhesitatingly at each other, then Mr. Joyce extended his hand cordially.

"You are a noble woman, Ida. You are right, perfectly right; I am wrong, all wrong. Your wish shall be sacred. And now, dear Ida, let me wish you good-night."

Kindly as a father would kiss his daughter her husband touched his lips to her forehead, and left her alone.

Alone with her heartache, heart anguish; and on bended knee she besought the healing of her wounded, bleeding heart.

All through the long night-hours she watched and prayed, and when the flushings in the east announced the coming day, her heavy eyes betokened her wakeful vigil.

CHAPTER XXIV.

TWELVE O'CLOCK.

THAT succeeding morning passed all too slowly to Maude Elverton, whose thoughts went forward with bounding anticipations to the moment when her lover should tell her again and more freely of his love for her.

A blissful light beamed in her eyes, and her voice was soft and low as she spoke. Her parents knew that she had released Casselmaine, and they at first objected strongly. But George's persuasions, united with her own request, received their reward, and she heard from her father's lips that he sanctioned the annulment of the engagement.

Mrs. Elverton was more displeased than her husband, and openly asked Maude if her preference for Frederic Trevlyn had not caused this disruption.

Maude candidly confessed, though with blushes and hesitancy, that she did love Trevlyn, but that, had she not assured herself of Casselmaine's indifference to her, she should never have withdrawn.

"And if Mr. Trevlyn doesn't care for you, what will you do?" Mrs. Elverton interrogated her cruelly.

"He does return—he does care for me. He told me yesterday; and this morning at twelve he calls to see me."

A satisfied smile curled Mrs. Elverton's haughty lip, and she turned away from her daughter, who, with fast-throbbing heart, awaited her lover's coming.

At that very moment Frederic Trevlyn was bending over a letter he had just written, in which the ink was still wet and fresh.

Before him lay scattered many letters and notes, which from time to time he consulted; then, when he had read, began his writing again. It was a long, long letter, which he wrote, and his face indicated the passage of varied emotions through his soul as he penned each line.

At times an expression of intensest agony contracted his features; then, that was quickly followed by a proud, defiant smile, to be as rapidly succeeded by a stern look of duty—duty that he felt he must perform, would perform in spite of any human power.

After he wrote, he read his letter. Half through, he tore the sheet into a dozen pieces.

On a fresh sheet he transcribed a line, signed his name, and thrust the sheet into the envelope, hastily and wildly, as if he feared he would repent.

He called William and directed him to post the letter immediately.

That dispatched, he rung for Mrs. Holcombe.

"Are the rooms in readiness, the western suite?"

"Everything is in perfect order, sir, and I think you'll be pleased with my arrangement. Will you step up-stairs and see the rooms?"

"No—no," he replied, hesitatingly; "I think there

is no occasion for that. But, I wish to ask a favor of you. If company comes to the Archery—a lady—will you exert yourself to the utmost to make her happy and contented?"

Mrs. Holcombe answered by a glance, half-aggravated, half-wondering.

"I know you always do make everything pleasant for those around you and I only ventured to mention this to you, because if any one comes, her position will be a very peculiar one."

"Mr. Trevlyn, if it is your wife you are going to marry and bring home, no woman should be happier, and no one will serve her more faithfully than I."

A tear gathered under her spectacles, but she forgot to brush it away, in her amazement at Frederic's conduct.

While she was speaking, a vivid blush had arisen to his cheeks, and he seemed ill at ease. A sudden idea inspired Mrs. Holcombe.

"My dear Mr. Trevlyn, I am old enough to be your mother, therefore I hope you will take what I say as an act of kindness. Were you my son, I would do just what I am doing now, and ask just what I am going to ask now."

She came up closely to him, and laid her hand lovingly on his head.

"My boy, is it a *wife*, a good, true *wife* you are going to bring?"

A groan burst from his pale lips as she ceased.

"Because, my dear Mr. Frederic, if you are going to dishonor yourself, your home, your servant, I can not remain here to witness it."

He caught her hand and laid it against his hot forehead.

"Mrs. Holcombe, your honor and mine will receive no stain from the guest who shall demand our courtesy. She will please you, you will love her. I—oh, Mrs. Holcombe, if you but dreamed of the constant darkness I walk in, you would pity me—yes, you would weep over me, as a mother for her heart-broken son."

A great racking sob burst from his white lips, and then he released her hand.

"To-day I must be away at dinner-time. To-morrow the lady will be with us; then I will explain more fully. Trust me, Mrs. Holcombe, trust me and bless me, and pray for me."

She murmured a broken benediction as he bowed his proud head before her, and then softly left him alone.

He gathered up his scattered papers, and arranged the disordered furniture.

Then he lifted the gray curtain and entered his mysterious retreat.

At first no sound broke the stillness; then a stifled moan came faintly from the darkness, and a voice, laden with anguish, fell mournfully on the still noon-air.

"Our merciful Father, strengthen me, assist me in this hour of deepest trial! enable me to sacrifice all for duty, all for right! and though I relinquish her who would have been—who *is*—God forgive me, the light of my life, let me believe it is for the best. When I waver in my sacrifice, oh, be merciful and sustain me! When I grope on in the darkness, be Thou my light! and when grief and sorrow shall mingle in my bitter cup, let me remember. Thy hands held it to my lips, and may I drain it even to the dregs!"

His tones died away, like the moaning of the autumn winds, and all was silent again, but only for a time.

"Strengthen her, my heart's idol—strengthen her for the load this day to fall on her heart with its crushing weight. Enable her to say, 'Thy will be done!' Bless us all, and remember, *another, another*, and may I be prepared to do my duty to her."

He ceased, and for several minutes he was silent again. Then the curtain parted, and he came forth, pale but composed.

The carriage, agreeably to his orders, was at the door. He took the lines himself, and drove slowly to the Grange.

He was shown into the parlor, where, before he had seated himself, Maude entered, beautiful and bewildering, her starry eyes charged with the love-light of her full heart.

"You returned safely, then, yesterday afternoon?"

He knew he must say something, yet he dreaded to speak the most commonplace remark.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Trevlyn; and you, since then, have been well, and"—she hesitated, blushed, then added—"happy?"

A spasm of pain crossed his fine face, but he met the occasion she offered of striking his own death-blow to hopes and joys.

"Maude," he said, in a hollow tone that startled himself, while she started in surprise at the sound, while an undefinable fear curdled her blood and drove the carnation from her cheeks.

He gazed upon her sweet face, while his eyes dimmed with manly tears as he thought of the revelation that hour would make. He felt that he could die to save her the pangs he must cause, and yet his own rashness had placed him on the ground they now occupied.

His brain grew fiercely hot, his heart beat in frightful rapidity, while he eagerly read her pale, startled face; then, by a mighty effort, he calmed himself sufficiently to speak.

"Come and sit down, Maude, and listen to what I must say; what you must hear even if it kills us both."

He drew her unresisting form to the sofa, and then he began:

"Yesterday I told you I loved you, Maude. To-day I come to ask you to forget I ever said it. No, you must not misconstrue my meaning," he

added, quickly and vehemently, as a proud light gleamed in her eyes, and she drew her skirts from his feet.

"No, no; the truth is none the less—the love is none the less, yet, Maude, I, the most pitiable man in God's universe, am here to beg you to forget those words, and if you can, forgive the speaker."

He brushed the great drops of perspiration from his forehead, and paused for her to speak. But she sat calm and silent, looking him full in the face.

"Don't look so, Maude; don't regard me so sternly. When you understand it all you will pity me, not hate me."

But she did not remove her eyes, for she could not, but a softer, tenderer expression crept into their dark depths.

"Frederic, what do you mean—are you afraid I regret your confession?"

"No, no," he returned, mildly. "Would that you did; but oh, Maude, when I spoke those words I must have been beside myself. I had no right to speak them, I ought to have been stricken dumb before my lips framed them. But the temptation overwhelmed me, and I did what I to-day suffer for—what you will suffer for. But you will forgive me, won't you?"

His pleading, passionate eyes looked eagerly in hers.

"I feel bewildered; I can not understand what all this means, Frederic. If you think I do not love you, you are wrong; my love for you is the one dream of my life. But if you do not care for me—why—then—"

Her lips quivered, and a tear fell on his face.

"Maude, Maude, you will drive me crazy," he whispered, hoarsely, his white lips trembling so he could hardly speak. "Yesterday I told you, defying the honor that should have restrained me, that I loved you. But harder than any thing I ever did, or can do, is it to-day, to tell you—oh, merciful Father—must I give her up?—yes, Maude, my lost Maude, I can not accept that love—you must not be my wife."

He had spoken at last, and, with a faint cry, Maude reached forth her hands imploringly.

"Why, why, oh, Frederic, will you not let me love you and be your wife?"

Her bosom heaved with the confined grief, and her eyes glared with unshed tears.

He put her hands gently down.

"Listen, Maude," he answered, quietly, though every word seemed a drop of blood oozing from his wounded heart; "can you not guess what is the reason I am killing our hearts?"

Slowly she drooped her head on her bosom; slowly the warmth left the little hand that just touched his own.

"Maude, shall I, may I, dare I tell you?"

She murmured an inarticulate whisper, and he, in the mighty love he was so earnestly striving to smother, thought he would rather die, then and there, than cut the last chord that bound him to her, than speak this last word, which, when spoken, effectually and forever divided them, and sent them both drifting apart—further—further.

"I know the stab I inflict, my poor Maude, but, listen, listen, and may a merciful Savior sanctify the cross to us—to you, my trusting, innocent one. Maude, I am married!"

For a moment she sat, stiff, upright; then, slowly, mechanically, she arose, and pressed her cold, quivering lips for one moment on his own. He did not return the pressure, he dared not; then she lifted his chin with her cold hands, and for a moment steadily regarded his face.

With that last, lingering, touching glance she went quietly from the room, and Frederic Trevlyn, as sadly, silently, went from the house.

His self-appointed task was done, and he knew God would reward them both one day.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SECRET OF THE CHAMBER.

THE guests had all departed from the Arch street mansion; the lights were extinguished, and Clare Trevlyn and Esther were alone in the chamber of the former.

Clare seemed almost frenzied at something; her eyes were swollen with tears, and at times they darted rays of glowing fire. Now she was pacing the floor of the long room, her elegant evening dress trailing on the velvet covering under her feet.

On her graceful person the diamonds gleamed and glittered, but she was regardless of their splendor. She who, but a few hours before, had proudly smiled at her own loveliness, now bowed her royal head in misery and despair.

"Esther, Esther, to think my first attempt toward winning his love should have been the time when I first learned of his treachery. Oh, why do I speak thus? I will not believe it. Esther, do you believe it?"

Esther laughed scornfully.

"Why shouldn't I? Haven't I always insisted that Frederic Trevlyn was a villain, since the days he refused to credit your innocence? Of course I believe it, fully and entirely, and you do, too."

Her voice softened as she finished, for a woeful mournfulness clouded Clare's face.

"Be my adviser, dear Esther. Not my cross, prejudiced housekeeper, but my mother's dutiful adopted child, my loving foster-sister, again. Speak gently, please, Esther, and tell me what to do."

Her tearful, pleading eyes were fixed in mute appeal on her companion's hard, stony face.

"If you do not believe that Mr. Casselmaine has told you the truth, most certainly I advise you to travel at once to the Archery and see for yourself if your husband is paying his addresses to this young lady."

"Mr. Casselmaine is a real gentleman, and seemed deeply grieved when he learned I was Frederic's wife. He was very much startled, and when he asked me for a private interview I felt a presentiment that something was going to happen. But I little dreamed what it was." Her unrestrained tears leaped forth again in torrents of grief.

"Don't cry, my little Clare, my dear little sister. It will all come right eventually, depend upon it, and even if it doesn't, let the thought comfort you that you are sinned against, and not sinning."

"But it wounds me so deeply, Esther; it causes a feeling I can't describe to come all over me, when I imagine Fred, my Fred, my darling, kissing some other woman; telling some other woman he loves her better than life itself! Oh, Esther, when we were betrothed he was so tender and gentle and loving, and I know just how he would do again."

Her pitiful sobs shook her frame fearfully.

"Clare, you must not grieve so. You will cry yourself sick. Let me prepare you some valerian, for you are entirely too nervous."

Esther spoke commandingly, as she arose to prepare the quieting draught.

"I need no valerian; I need comfort and sympathy. Sit down, Esther, and let me talk more to you."

"To-night we will rest; to-morrow you must help me pack my trunk, for I shall go to New York. Esther," she added, abruptly, clasping and unclasping her restless fingers, "do you think I can win him back? had I better confront him, or see the lady, or merely watch them secretly, until I am satisfied?"

"I cannot tell. You can decide that point better after you reach the neighborhood."

Clare removed her jewels and the costly silk dress, that had been the admiration of so many guests that night, and in her night-wrapper sought her couch for a little rest.

The sun was shining brightly when she awoke from a deep, troubled sleep, and she sprung, bewildered, to her feet, vainly trying to recall the events of the past night.

Suddenly they came appallingly plain to her, and she covered her face with her hands, and a half-hour passed before she could regain the composure necessary for the duties of the day. Esther was then summoned, and all day long the two women labored over preparations for a journey and absence which might extend to many weeks.

Early the next morning, ere she had left her chamber, a ring at the basement door was followed by a timid tap on her own, and one of her maids handed her a letter.

A strange sensation thrilled her as she took it, and an exclamation fell involuntarily from her lips, for it was subscribed in her husband's handwriting.

Almost frantically she tore off the envelope. The letter was very brief, and its contents ran thus:

"Mrs. Trevlyn will oblige her husband by coming immediately, on this receipt, to the Archery."

"FREDERIC TREVLYN."

A sudden sunburst of rapturous joy shone over her face, and in an ecstasy of delight she dropped on her knees in thankful prayer.

"Esther, Esther," she called over the railing of the stairs, "come, quickly."

"See," she whispered, holding the letter up as Esther entered, "see the glorious news!"

As excited as Clare, Esther seized the note. A shadow of pain crossed her stern, homely face as she handed it back.

"I have altered my mind. I believe Mr. Casselmaine was mistaken; I believe Frederic Trevlyn is true to you."

A thankful smile looked from Clare's eyes.

"To think I am all ready to go, too," she said, merrily. "And, oh, Esther, just suppose I never come back, just only suppose he wants me to stay forever—oh, such happiness would almost kill me, I believe."

She pressed her white hands over her heart, so wildly was it beating.

"Come down for a lunch, before the carriage is ready. Come."

"I cannot eat—do not ask me. I am so happy I feel that food is a superfluous necessity. Do not urge me, please, dear Esther, for I will have a grand dinner with him, perhaps, at my own table, in our house."

She sat down in the little crimson velvet rocking-chair, and cried from very excess of bliss.

Esther smoothed her hair assuringly, and gradually her emotion calmed, until, when the carriage drove up, and her trunk strapped on, she was her own bright, radiant, happy self.

Kissing Esther a merry adieu, she sprung lightly into the carriage and was driven off. She was in good time for the Kensington train for New York, and in five hours she alighted at the Jersey City depot.

Crossing the ferry, she called a cab, and was driven to the Hudson River depot in Thirty-first street.

The train carried her rapidly to her destination, and a half-hour's brisk ride brought her to the station at Yonkers, from which place she would ride by coach to the Archery.

Alighting from the car, a stranger touched her on the shoulder.

"You are Mrs. Trevlyn, going to the Archery?"

She replied affirmatively, and, to her surprise and heartfelt gratification, ascertained that the family barouche was awaiting her.

"He loves me! he loves me!" she repeated to herself, as she noted the kindness of her husband in providing for her comfort.

The road lay through the village and up the beautiful terraced hill above, near whose summit the

white walls of the Archery were gleaming in the afternoon sunshine.

As they entered the open gate, her heart bounded wildly at the thought of so soon meeting the one she so well loved. Would he welcome her warmly, would he kiss her, would she be allowed to clasp her arms around his neck once more?"

The carriage stopped, and the footman assisted her to alight.

The door was open that led to the outer vestibule, and the glass doors, with their rosewood panels, low drapery and silvery knobs, were ajar.

She stepped lightly, timidly; what would be her welcome? She could hear her heart beat in the solemn stillness; then she laid her hand on the door-handle.

Widely it opened by other hands than her own, and her husband reached his hand in dignified courtesy to welcome her.

She forgot etiquette, forgot his previous coldness, and springing up, she threw her arms about him.

"Fred, my darling, you believe me, you trust me, you love me?"

He gently disengaged her clinging arms, just as a matronly-looking lady entered the hall by the south door.

"Mrs. Holcombe, this is the lady I promised. My wife my housekeeper. The 'Clare' you remember. Escort her to her rooms, and I will come in a half-hour."

He bowed not unkindly to Clare, who followed Mrs. Holcombe through the spacious halls and stairways to her room.

It was the room she had visited but a few weeks before.

"Please tell Mr. Trevlyn to send my trunk as soon as he finds it convenient."

Mrs. Holcombe—her kind heart full of joy that her favorite "Clare," as she declared she was ever since the day of her visit, was really and truly her young master's wife—hastened to obey the new mistress's request.

Her trunk came up immediately. From it she selected a simple white dress, and letting down her hair as she knew he used to like it best, awaited his coming.

Soon his rapid footfall sounded along the hall, and, without knocking, he entered the room.

She did not rise to greet him, but her joy shone in every line of her fair, sweet face.

He walked up to her, and smiled.

"Clare, shall we bury the past? If we can not reinstate each other in our inmost hearts, at least we will strive faithfully to forgive and forget."

She took his hand and drew him to her side, and looked into his calm, handsome face.

"As your wife, Frederic, I may say what I would not dare to, were I only a betrothed—and yet it seems very like a betrothal, this sweet, sudden reconciliation."

She blushed in spite of herself, however, as Fred smiled a faint smile.

"I have nothing to forgive, my husband, because the great love I have always borne you has palliated every thing that has occurred. But, Frederic, let me make a simple explanation, that I have never been permitted to do. May I?"

He bowed affirmatively.

"Frederic, the gentleman you saw place his arms around my neck and kiss me so warmly was my only brother."

An expression of thankfulness lighted his face.

"And I judged you harshly, Clare! You are loyal and true still."

"And loving," she added, laying her head on his shoulder.

He trembled, and closed his eyes a moment.

"Clare, let me confess that I have not been loyal in thought and heart, thought I have been in act. I have fought and won a fearful battle, and I humbly tell you that I am but the trace of my old self. I am no longer the man who could love deeply, ardently—but a trembling, sinful one, who strives to fulfill his duty."

His voice trembled, and Clare felt the shiver that quivered through his frame as she leaned against him.

Her own face grew pallid as death.

"And you've ceased to love me, then? Oh that I had died before I heard it."

The cry came from her stricken heart.

"Truth compels me to say it. A stern resolve to do my duty—be it ever so fearful in the performance—impels me to confess it to you. Yet, Clare, there is still a holy tie that binds us, a sweet bond of indissoluble sympathy. I never can forget, Clare, that you were the mother of my child."

A mist gathered in his eyes, and the mother's heart overflowed with mingled anguish and bliss.

"Come, Clare, a moment with me."

She accepted his proffered arm, and they descended to his sacred room.

He pointed to the vaulted recess.

"There, Clare, is my shrine. That silent little retreat contains the talisman that has, under God, saved me from sin worse than murder. When temptations so whirling that my brain reeled blew upon me, here I came, here I suffered, fought, and, thank God, conquered. Will you enter with me, and learn its secret? No mortal eye but my own ever invaded its sanctity; but you shall enter. You have even a better right than I."

Tremblingly she suffered herself to be drawn along; he raised the gray cloud of drapery, and the two stood within the secret room.

It was a small apartment, and the wall was hung with black velvet, studded with golden stars.

But two objects occupied the room.

In one corner stood an ebony table, where lay an open Bible, and beside it a silver candlestick, in

which flamed faintly a waxen taper. In the center, on a low, marble table, lay a tiny white coffin, simple and unpretending. With a bound, Clare sprang from Frederic's arm, and knelt beside the casket, her hot tears flowing fast and copious.

It was a baby that lay there, white and beautiful as a sleeping angel. The tiny hands were folded on the little breast, and a little bare leg, plump and marble-hard and pure, was visible.

The face was a perfect repetition of its father, save that a happy repose marked the features, where stern *hauteur* stamped the parent.

The thin dark hair curled carelessly over the fine head, and the long dark lashes shaded the white cheek.

Clare's sobs ceased; then she arose and looked long and eagerly on the infant's placid sleep.

"My baby—my Effie—darling!"

"Our child, Clare, is happier than either of us. When she died, two years ago, I had her tiny body embalmed, and enshrined very near me, for I felt the powerful tide of fate that was sweeping on to me. A good God has blessed the memory of our daughter to me, and to-day I can lay my hand on her sinless brow and confess all I have done."

With one arm thrown around Clare's waist, who wept silently while he spoke, and the other on their baby's white forehead, he told her all.

Not a word, not a syllable did he conceal, and, when he had finished, he bent over his heart-broken wife.

"Clare, can you forgive me?"

"A thousand times, yes. Only give me a little of the olden time love, only remember sometimes I am Effie's mother, and I will try to bear it; but, Frederic, my lost husband, it will break my heart, I know."

"We will help each other on our life's journey, and in heaven, where there is no marriage, or giving in marriage, we will reap the reward of our sacrifice."

He led her away, and then locked their treasure in again.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE VALLEY AND SHADOW.

PEOPLE do not often die of broken hearts, and yet people said Maude Elverton was certainly fading fast.

She had never been herself since the day she had bidden farewell to every hope and anticipation. She had seen Frederic Trevlyn's wife, and had met him once. She had striven earnestly to be calm and cold, and had succeeded, but, after the interview was over her false strength left her.

Her cheeks lost their lovely carnation, and her eyes gleamed with a luster that bespoke the insidious foe advancing so surely, so rapidly.

Every available effort of skill was exerted for her, but she grew no better, and, at last, when the holidays drew near, she was a captive in her room.

Weaker and weaker she became, and on the Christmas eve she laid herself down on her costly couch for the last time.

"If you have a wish, speak, my child, and it shall be granted, if human love can accomplish it."

For a moment a bright spot glowed on either cheek, and she smiled gratefully at her mother.

"Send for him, then, and let me bid him adieu."

A cloud darkened Mrs. Elverton's haughty face, for she, in her heart, accused Frederic Trevlyn of the treachery that caused her darling idol's death.

But she promptly complied with the request, and the messenger carried the note to the Archery. Frederic and Clare were sitting together, he engaged with a drawing, she industriously sewing, when the man entered.

Frederic knew Maude was dying, and he felt the keenness of the blow as no one else could feel. The bitterness of his heart was increased by the self-forced knowledge that *he* was an indirect cause of her premature death, and yet, in the self-communion he held, he knew he had done what he could to rectify his fault.

The messenger handed him the note. He read it with a visible start and a deathly pallor, and then handed it to Clare.

She read it and returned it.

"Go, Frederic, and comfort the dying girl."

"You will accompany me, Clare?"

"Do you desire it?"

"I shall not go unless you go with me."

The sun was just setting when they entered the sick chamber.

Maude saw Frederic the moment the door opened, and beckoned him to her, while a smile of unutterable joy lighted her sunken eyes.

Clare, with choking emotion, retired to the window, where she could not be seen, yet where, if she chose, she might witness all that passed.

"God bless you, Frederic," was whispered, as he knelt beside the low couch and raised her wan hand to his lips.

"I knew you would come at the last, and let me see a moment your dear face."

She passed her hand tremblingly over his features, and smiled contentedly.

"Your beautiful little wife loves you dearly, Frederic—better than you love her. I have stood between you, Frederic; but forget me after I'm gone, and make her lot what it ought to be—the most blessed of living women. Do it for my sake and for hers."

Her soul-lit eyes looked in his with the most tender pride; then, after a long, long glance, she closed them slowly.

"Frederic," she whispered a moment later, "say you forgive me."

"Forgive you, Maude? for what?"

"For loving you when it was wrong—when I knew you were married. But I could not help it;

it would come, and the more I tried the more it came."

"Forgive me, my poor dying Maude! I am the villain, I the murderer of your fair young life! Tell me that I am pardoned."

"No, Frederic; should I pardon that which has been my only comfort these long weary weeks? Not so, Frederic; I could not forgive."

A smile like her former self flitted over her face.

He kissed her pale hands softly.

"Frederic, tell your wife to come. She is here, is she not?"

He beckoned to Clare, who, suffused with tears, obeyed her call.

Maude took their hands and joined them in her little wasted one.

"This is my last act in the world, dearest Frederic. Mrs. Trevlyn, I loved your husband, I love him now; but you will forgive the dying girl, will you not? Oh, Mrs. Trevlyn, be fond of him; love him truly, love him dearly, and take him as my dying gift. Frederic, cherish her as a true wife should be cherished, and when your happiness has grown perfect, remember Maude as one who worshiped you with a love that was more than mortal. Dear—dear Fred—"

Her voice suddenly ceased; her arm fell by her side, and she lay motionless on the pillow—the rare, sweet old smile on her face.

The physician entered, accompanied by her parents.

By the bedside they stood, silent and weeping. Then the physician spoke, solemnly and impressively:

"Madam, sir, your daughter is dead!"

There were aching hearts at the Grange that night, when the distracted parents knelt beside the silent Maude, wan and wasted, yet exceedingly beautiful even in death.

There were sorely-trying hearts at the Archery that night, that moonlight Christmas night, when from twilight till dawn Frederic Trevlyn paced alone the floor of his holy retreat, and with his dead child and his Bible, struggled for resignation, for peace, for the satisfaction of the performance of duty.

And the answer to his prayers came, for, with the morning light, he went to their room, where slept Clare, her lashes still glistening with the tear-drops.

He bent over her and kissed her.

With a thrilling cry she sprang up.

"Frederic, Frederic, do you love me at last?"

"At last, my Clare! The other love is the love for an angel in heaven; God has made me better for it—more worthy of you, who have suffered so much. Will my recovered treasure forgive me?"

She kissed his eyes, his mouth, his hands.

"Oh, Fred, my precious husband, all the agony I have endured is well worth suffering for the bliss I this moment enjoy."

"Then is poor, dear Maude's wish fulfilled, and from the ashes of the past has arisen a new, a holy love for you, my sweet one, which transcends every emotion I ever felt for you. I never loved you so truly as now, my wife."

Thus the words Clare had so long starved for came.

Frederic Trevlyn and Clare were at rest.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AFTER MANY DAYS.

THE spacious room of the Villa had been closed and darkened for six long months; heavy folds of crape had hung from every window and door, and the glad spring sunshine had been forbidden entrance in the grand gloomy rooms.

The family had been visited by the overruling hand of Providence, and death, who respected no persons, had entered this palatial abode, and laid his icy finger on two of its members.

Helen Joyce, in all the strength and glory of her womanhood, had been felled by the relentless hand, and slept side by side with her aged father in the distant cemetery.

Ida Tressel was a widow, a virgin widow. Her husband had gradually failed, and, faithful to her womanly heart, she had tended him, waited on him, and striven to please his every whim. And in his last minutes he had blessed her and called her the star of his life.

And now Ida resolved that the Villa, *her* Villa now, with all its appliances and elegances, should cast off its costly mourning, and once more let in the fresh, sweet air and dancing sunbeams.

Her commands were gladly obeyed; the funeral tokens were removed. Ida once more regained her elasticity of step, and merriment of manner.

Day by day she moved in her elegant home the queen of all hearts, for Julia and Irene had long since learned to love her; Helen alone carried her hatred for her father's wife to the grave with her. At last the year of mourning elapsed, and Ida laid away her gloomy robes, replacing them with the colors she loved so well in her girlhood. Visitors flocked to the Villa, and many an admirer laid his heart at the charming widow's feet, but to all was she decisively negative.

Since her husband's death she had visited much more than ever before, and she and Clare Trevlyn, the beautiful, happy wife of Frederic Trevlyn, now the proud mother of a noble baby boy, were best and truest of friends.

Each had confided the story of her early life to the other, thus cementing the tie that bound them so closely.

One bright afternoon, when the May flowers were peeping among the green grass, Ida, as was her usual custom, called the carriage for her semi-weekly visit to the Archery. Jeannie had superintended her toilet, and it being one of the few warm days in the glad, welcome spring-time, had induced Mrs.

Joyce to wear a white Marseilles. Ida blushed with proud delight as she saw her sweet reflection, and the days of her girlhood came back with forcible power.

Her early happy days when she dreamed the sweet dream of love, which had been so rudely awakened, but restored *now*!

Today, an unusual lightness filled her spirit. She laughed and danced and sung through the house like a school-girl, rather than the stepmother of a young lady.

That she often thought of one, still the dearest to her of any on earth, is not strange, and she and Clare, and Frederic, too, often spoke of George Casselmaine, and from them she learned he was traveling in Europe, still unmarried.

"And still true to me," she would add, gently.

The carriage carried her to the Archery, and, as usual, Clare met her with a warm welcome.

"Do not alight, Ida, dear, for your ride is not yet ended. There was a man here a few moments ago who desires to purchase your old home—the Cottage—and if you do not wish to keep it, I would advise you to let him have it."

Ida toyed carelessly with one of Clare's curls.

"Perhaps I had better drive down and see what he says. Jump in, Clare. It won't take long."

Ida playfully dragged her a step nearer.

"Bless you, my child, I cannot! Fred and Freddie are calling me. I'll see you when you return."

She threw Ida a merry kiss, while the carriage drove rapidly up to Rose Cottage, where Ida sprang out unassisted, and ran lightly and gracefully up the narrow path.

Every thing was just as it was two years before the same white curtains—the same old oaken chairs on the porch. The door was ajar, and a youngster peering through the railings told her "a man went in there."

Carelessly, and humming a merry air, she ascended the steps that led to the dining-room. There stood the stranger, tall, graceful, stylish. She abruptly paused, and he suddenly faced her.

For a moment her heart seemed numbed; then, with a thrilling cry of joy, she went straight up to him, and lifted her lips to his.

"My darling! I *knew* you would come!"

He twined his arms closely about her, and she laid her head on his bosom; he looked tenderly down in her happy, true eyes.

"And you trusted me, my loving little one? and give me to-day all the wealth of love I came for two years ago?"

"All, all, and more!"

He kissed her fondly, and stroked back her waving hair.

"The two years have been dark and dreary to me, my Ida, but I trusted and waited. And now this is my reward."

"And I, dearest, bore my burden patiently and faithfully, praying for strength, and looking forward to *my* reward."

"Does it meet your expectations?"

He smiled lovingly as he asked.

She laid her little hand over his lips.

"You know it does. You know we both have reasons for a lifetime of gratefulness and thanksgiving to a merciful God who, in his infinite compassion, no less than omnipotent wisdom, has crowned our life with rejoicing."

"And love—for *He* is love," added Casselmaine, reverentially.

THE END.

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